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Edited by
Kuncheria Pathil

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jeevadharma

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

Contributions of J.B. Chethimattam To Indian Theology

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CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	275
<i>My Friend and Colleague John Britto Chethimattam</i>	279
<i>J. C. Manalel</i>	
<i>John Britto Chethimattam: A Versatile Thinker</i>	287
<i>A. M. Mundadan</i>	
<i>Approaches to Philosophy, Indian and Western: A Philosophy of Dialogue</i>	302
<i>Thomas Kadankavil</i>	
<i>Orientations of Theology: Eastern and Western</i>	321
<i>Thomas Kollamparampil</i>	
<i>Towards Making an Indian Christian Theology</i>	
<i>The Vision of Fr. Chethimattam</i>	339
<i>V. F. Vineeth</i>	
<i>Christological Perspectives of John Chethimattam</i>	347
<i>Joseph Pathrapankal</i>	
<i>Chethimattam's Contributions Towards A Theology of the Church</i>	368
<i>Kuncheria Pathil</i>	
<i>Approaches to Inculcation and Liturgy</i>	381
<i>Louis Malieckal</i>	
<i>Chethimattam on Theology of Religions, Dialogue and Mission</i>	396
<i>Paulachan Kochappilly</i>	

Editorial

Prof. Dr. John Britto Chethimattam CMI (1922-2006) was one of the leading theologians of India who contributed very much to the development of Indian Christian theology. His publications include seven books in English, five books in Malayalam and over 100 articles published in different journals in India and abroad. He was one of the founding Fathers of Dharmaram College, Bangalore, its outstanding professor for more than 40 years, Dean of Studies and Rector. He also served as Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of Fordham University, New York, for several years. Fr. Chethimattam was the editor of Jeevadhara's issue on Interreligious Dialogue for 35 years without any interruption. In memory of his invaluable service and significant contributions to Jeevadhara we conducted a Symposium on his works and theological contributions on March 22- 24, 2007. We are very happy to publish some of the papers of this Symposium in this Number of Jeevadhara for the benefit of our readers, in whose minds and hearts the living memory of Fr. John Britto Chethimattam (JBC) must be still alive. We could include here only the papers of the Part II of the Symposium. All the papers of the Symposium will be published in one volume shortly.

Joseph Constantine Manalel, the General Editor of Jeevadhara, is a close friend and colleague of Fr. Chethimattam. In the introductory article Fr. Manalel recollects the fond memories of JBC and highlights his contributions to Jeevadhara, Indian Theological Association and to the Theology Course for the Laity, which was conducted in Kerala for the College and High School teachers even before the Vatican II. A.M. Mundadan, the well-known historian of Indian Christianity and also a long-term colleague of J.B. Chethimattam introduces the important works and significant contributions of JBC. After outlining

the general orientations of JBC, the author picks up four major areas or concerns of JBC, Interreligious dialogue, Christianity and other Religions, Dialogue and Evangelization and the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and he highlights the main trends of his thinking in a summary way, often in the very words of JBC. Thomas Kadankavil, who studied under JBC and later worked with him as his colleague traces here the philosophical journey of JBC. Chethimattam all through his life emphasized the differences in the Indian and Western approaches to Philosophy and highlighted the merits of the Indian approach to the reality through interiority.

The next article by Thomas Kollampparampil tries to articulate the overall theological orientations and approach of JBC. In many of his writings, JBC tried to highlight the values and riches of the Eastern and Indian traditions. For JBC, theology itself is something that arises from the experience of man on his communitarian understanding of salvation. In the Graeco-Roman rational approach emphasis is for definition, order, organization and administration but the original Mystery was lost. The so called "exclusivism", "inclusivism" and "pluralism" are western creations. We have to recover personal experience and the sense of absolute mystery. Closely related is JBC's main concern of Indian theology. V. F. Vineeth, a long-time colleague of JBC analyses the writings of JBC and outlines his concept of Indian Christian theology. It should not be an abstract, academic and comparative study of Indian religions and Christianity. On the contrary, it should take seriously the life of Indian people and their concrete situation of religious pluralism and massive poverty and lead them to integral liberation in Christ. JBC seems to move away from a rationalistic theology to a mystical approach to theology and reality, where personal experience plays the key role.

Is Jesus Christ the Saviour of Christians only or of the entire humankind? What is the relation between Jesus and other Saviour figures or other religions? Ever since the beginning of Christianity, these and similar questions were hotly discussed and debated in theology. Joseph Pathrapankal, the well-known Indian Bible scholar and colleague of JBC examines in this article the Christological perspectives of John Chethimattam. The focus of Christological

studies in India during the past twenty five years and more has been in the area of contextualization with sufficient attention paid both to the inherited Christology of the past and to the need of realistically understanding Christology within the context of India's religious pluralism and socio-economic complexity. Chethimattam tried to articulate a Christology that is biblically sound, spiritually satisfying, theologically credible and pastorally helpful in a religiously pluralistic world.

John Britto Chethimattam was one of the modern pioneers of Indian Christianity and Indian theology. Though academically he began his career as a philosopher committed to dialogue of Indian religions, very soon he proved himself to be an articulate Indian theologian and contributed very much to the development of modern Indian Christian theology. On the one hand, he always asserted the unique role of Jesus Christ in human salvation. On the other hand, he unambiguously affirmed the value and role of other religions in the one plan of God for human salvation. Interreligious dialogue is for him the attempt and means to relate Christian revelation to God's revelation in other religions. The role of the Church is to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus of establishing or preparing the way to the 'Kingdom of God' and all religions are contributing their share towards the realization of the Kingdom of God. In his article Kuncheria Pathil, who is both a student and colleague of JBC, highlights the ecclesiological reflections of Chethimattam.

Louis Malieckal, a student and colleague of Fr. Chethimattam introduces in another article the reflections of JBC on culture and inculturation in general and on liturgical inculturation in particular. Religious faith and spiritual truths are in the realm of the abstract and transcendent and they need concrete socio-cultural realities and symbols to become enflleshed or incarnated therein. Religion is already a socio-cultural reality where faith has become inculturated. It is the Gospel that can become inculturated in a new culture and not Catholicism, which is already one particular form of the inculturation of the Gospel. Proper inculturation can be done only by prophets and not by ritual-centred priests. In the last article, Paulachan Kochappilly, makes an attempt to summarize the main ideas of JBC on theology

of religions, dialogue and evangelization. He makes JBC himself speak and tries to interpret him. JBC writes mainly from the Indian context of religious pluralism and the socio-economic context of the people who aspire for integral liberation. In this context, dialogue of religions and liberative movements of the people should be the focus of the mission. It is nothing but to follow the mission and ministry of Jesus who proclaimed the Good News of the coming of the Reign of God and demanded from people a radical conversion of heart.

We hope that this preliminary work on Fr. John Britto Chethimattam will inspire many scholars and students to go deeper into his works and develop his thought. Fr. Chethimattam was very vocal and articulate in defending the cause of Indian theology against the higher ecclesiastical authorities, though sometimes he criticized his own colleagues in India in strong terms for compromising the essentials of Christian faith. Of course, Chethimattam had his own limitations and sometimes he misunderstood his colleagues. He was a vigorous debater, provoking and embarrassing many, but with malice towards none. We have to stand for the cause for which he lived and fought and we have take it far beyond his times.

Kuncheria Pathil

Associate General Editor

Jeevadhara

Kottayam

John Britto Chethimattam: My Friend and Colleague

Joseph Constantine Manalel

Joseph Constantine Manalel, the Founder-Director of Theology Centre Kottayam and the General Editor of *Jeevadharma* recollects his fond memories of John Britto Chethimattam, his close friend and colleague, and their intimate relationship over a period of half a century. Fr. Britto's invaluable and dedicated services in conducting the Theology Course for the Laity, for launching the Journal *Jeevadharma* and the Indian Theological Association are gratefully remembered.

John Britto Chethimattam was born on 7th July 1922 at Thottakkad in Kottayam District of Kerala State. After completing High School Education in 1939 he joined the CMI (then TOCD) Congregation and professed his religious vows on 15th October 1942. Then he studied Philosophy and Theology at St. Joseph's Seminary, Managalore and was ordained priest on 7th April 1951. Immediately he started teaching Theology at Sacred Heart Seminary, Chethipuzha. Soon he joined the Gregorian University, Rome where he had his Licentiate in Theology in 1953 and in Philosophy in 1955 and his Doctorate in Divinity in 1957. He returned to India the same year and ever since he taught Theology, Philosophy and Comparative Religion at Dharmaram College Bangalore, though not uninterruptedly till his death in 2006. He became a graduate student again of Philosophy first at Fordham University, U.S.A. in 1965-66 and then at Harvard University in 1966-67. In the Fall of 1967 he completed his Ph.D.dissertation at Fordham, even while teaching in Fordham. Then he returned to India and became the Rector of Dharmaram college, Bangalore from 1972-75 Again he started teaching at Fordham,

while every summer he returned to India to resume his teaching at Dharmaram. From High School to post-graduate Degrees he passed almost always with highest honours.

One who closely goes through the above short bio-data of Chethimattam will easily see how extraordinarily intelligent and quick-witted he was as to obtain his Doctorates in Philosophy and Theology with so much ease and in as short a time as possible and that too most often with flying colours. For such persons Diplomas and Degrees are mere decorations for recognition by others. Of course, Chethimattam, as he was destined for teaching needed the academic degrees. But he was as good as without them. He could himself master many of the social sciences and learn many languages, besides English and Malayalam, such as Latin, Sanskrit, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, French, German and could pick up others at will. He was a voracious reader, read thousands of books that came his way retaining the important points after his quite reading. So it was so easy for him to make a speech or write an article instantly or within a short time for which ordinary people with doctorate Degrees would take weeks. Let nobody be mistaken that what is said here is mere conjectures or from hearsay. My contact with John Britto Chethimattam dates from as far back as 1957 when he returned from Rome after his higher studies. Thereon he was invited to address all the important National Seminars organized by different Catholic institutions through out India. Somehow I happened to be present on many such occasions as an invitee.

Our intimate relationship formally got established with the Theology Course for the Laity which was started in 1961 even before Vatican II for post-graduates when such a Course for the Laity was unheard of in India. Its objective was to rediscover the position of the Laity in the Church, to acknowledge and encourage their leadership, to avoid their slavish dependence on priests in the government of the Church, to be proud of their Christian heritage in the world and to profess their faith unabashedly and to give reason for it, and above all, to encourage their leadership in the Church and society at large. A few details of the course are given below in order that readers may have a glimpse of our relationship. It was a four-year course with one full

month every year during summer vacation. Every day was a working day, with four classes of 45 minutes each, two in Theology and two in the Bible and two group discussions of a hour and a half each, one by groups and the other between groups, Sunday being a holiday for the summing up of the previous week's work, intermingled with many interesting items. The whole course was an ideal Live-Together of teachers and the taught from 6 o'clock in the morning till 10.30 at night – just time for going to bed. It was a harmonious combination of teaching and learning, prayer and practice with music and dance items of entertainment.. Chethimattam taught Theology and Rayan the Bible and I took care of the discussions but with all actively participating in all the items. Chethimattam and Rayan continued to teach two 4-year Courses (eight years), if I am not mistaken. All the participants were teachers, fifty to sixty mature men and women with M.A., M.Sc., and Ph.D. degrees and all were learners too, including us. Every item was the concern of all but without any interference. It was a wonderful experience which year after year cemented together our relationship. Apart from all high-flown words, remember, it was the warmest time of the year in one or another of our colleges in Kerala with little comforts or conveniences when all would like to spend their holidays in some health resorts. That only increased its excellence. I still remember how punctual Chethimattam, as also Rayan were, in coming to the venue always the day before the course started and staying one whole month together, sharing all inconveniences together as the members of one family. It was a relationship par excellence.

Jeevadharma, the Journal for Christian Interpretations, was another project of our Theology Centre in which Chehthimattam cooperated whole-heartedly, as he did always. The first four theologians with whom I consulted at first were John Chethimattam, Samuel Rayan, Sebastian Kappen and K.Luke. More and more meetings with more and more theologians were held in different parts of India so as to convince them of the need for a Journal and an Association which would courageously stand for Truth and Freedom of thought and expression, especially after Vatican II lest its teachings should be overlooked or even overrun by the powers that be, as it, alas, eventually

happened. Thus a consensus seems to have been created among theologians that there should be a Journal that would have such a clear theological perception. Thus we started *Jeevadhara* in 1971 with the little means in hand. At least for the first twenty years, if not more, nobody accepted any remuneration for his/her contributions to *Jeevadhara*.

Chethimattam with his vast knowledge and quick wits was a treasure to *Jeevadhara*, though he was often not accessible as he was away in the States teaching Philosophy at Fordham University, USA. But his services were readily available whenever needed. From the very beginning in 1971 he was on the Editorial Board of *Jeevadhara* as the prestigious Editor of the Section on Dialogue and Religion till his death in 2006. In this period of 36 years I cannot remember a single instance of his failure to send the matter for his issue in time whether he was in the States or here in India. The last issue he edited is November 2005, and the two Seminars he participated in, both in collaboration with the M.G. University Departments, one in the University campus itself, were on (1) "Social Transformation in Higher Education" and (2) "Scientific Research Methodology". Some of those in the University who attended the Seminars were wondering that they had never seen such eminent scholars, for Chethimattam was speaking instead of reading from his papers. Chethimattam was also our Book Review Editor for the last 36 years. He could read any number of books in a short time for which others as a rule would take months. It is difficult to find an adept Book Review Editor like him.

Jeevadhara was followed by the founding of the Indian Theological Association. There were at first about fifty theologians on the Editorial Board of *Jeevadhara*, as Section Editors and Sectional Boards of Editors. Though more theologians were willing to be on the Board, we found it difficult to accommodate all and so an Association for all Indian Theologians was founded and that is "Indian Theological Association" (ITA). There was a providential arrangement for its Inauguration. As I was looking for a suitable venue, an invitation was received from the Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, Bishop Patrick D'Souza of

Varanasi that I should present a Paper on “Authority, Freedom and Responsibility in the Indian Church” at the first Dialogue between Bishops and Theologians. As soon as I received the invitation I contacted Fr. Chethimattam, but he said he had not received any such invitation. Some others also said the same. So right away I wrote to Bishop Partick that some of our best theologians had not been invited but their participation in the Dialogue was essential. As they all were invited the best theologians were there except Sebastian Kappen who was not in the good books of the Bishops. I wrote to all the theologians invited for the Dialogue besides others that the Inauguration of the Indian Theological Association would be held at the same venue of the Dialogue, Jeevan Jyoti, Hyderabad immediately after its dispersal. The Dialogue stopped with that first meeting to resume only after many years. But the ITA continues to this day without any interruption.

For many years at the Annual Meetings of the ITA Chethimattam used to draw up the Official Statements of the Association. That itself was an intellectual feat. One had to be quick-witted and closely attentive to all the papers from some six to ten or twelve presented at the meeting as well as to all the discussions that followed and to draw up then and there the general statement for publication in Scholarly journals such as would reveal the status and standard of the Indian theologians. As far as I know such statements then attracted the attention of the scholars abroad. Later on Chethimattam's place had to be filled up by a team of several persons who are doing it part by part so as to be coalesced into a whole and so some times the coherence of the statement is found wanting. It was most interesting to be present at the passing of the final statements by the general body meetings when Chethimattam presented it and Raimon Panikkar led the discussion of it part by part. It was a confluence of breadth and depth – a continuous repartee.

Let me now pass on to another programme of our Theology Centre in which Fr. Chethimattam played a significant role. “Jeevadhara Department of Socio-Religious Research”(JDSR) recognized by the M.G.University, as per our application, was an attempt to relate our theology to the secular University circles so that theology and its

programmes be broadened in dialogue with the secular sciences and concerns. Then we applied for recognition of guides. Out of twelve cases of well qualified scholars we had applied, only two have as yet been recognized, namely Fr Britto and Fr.Kuncheria Pathil and that too after 2 years of continuous correspondence and phone calls. Britto was recognized for his Ph.D. in philosophy at Fordham and Pathil for his Ph.D.in Religious Studies at the University of Louvain, Belgium. University people here have a certian taboo against theology. Britto had agreed to take the responsibility for JDSR and promised to come and stay at our Centre a week or two every month until he was relieved of the office he was holding and assured me that he would find M.Th.. students for our Ph.D.course. But God willed otherwise.

From half a century of my close and cordial relationship with Fr.Britto I came to know of his extraordinary “quick wits” and the consequent vast knowledge he had acquired in a comparatively short time. He was proficient in the whole area of philosophy and Theology whereas others often only in the areas of their specialization. He could deftly deal with the Social Sciences too. I have heard some people say he was inconsistent. I must distinguish: He was extraordinarily consistent in upholding right principles. As a result of new knowledge acquired there was a possibility of changing a view. We must know, Britto was a voracious reader, thirsting for new knowledge, unlike most of our Seminary or University professors, mostly retired, who seem to be so self-satisfied as not to care for new knowledge or study any new problem or at least up-date their already acquired knowledge. Whenever Britto had been to our Centre, he would take all the new books and issues of scholarly journals, especially *Concilium*, recently received, which I used to keep in my room and he would read them within the short time he was here and if he could not finish reading he would take them along with him but return invariably after reading them. New knowledge so acquired could very well have modified certain former views of his. That is only human.

And what is more, Britto’s simplicity of life was very remarkable. He was simple in food, simple in clothing, simple in the use of every thing worldly. He was satisfied with what was strictly necessary

with no trace of indulgence or affluence. So it was easy for people to entertain him. When I had been to the States I stayed for a few days in Britto's room, or to use the modern word, apartment. It consisted of two small rooms and a kitchen in an old building with hardly any furnishing. It was the smallest and the least furnished of all rooms I stayed in Europe and America during my foreign sojourn. That was where, I believe, Britto, the eminent Professor of Fordham University lived for a quarter of a century. He could very well have moved to an up-to-date well furnished apartment. Fr. Britto loved and helped everyone. As I could very well see, we loved intimately without the least taint of selfishness. So we could agree and even agree to disagree which was extremely rare. One can see it very clearly from the statement he made in his editorial of September 1997 of *Jeevadhara* published in connection with my Jubilee which was entirely of his own planning: "One of his (Constantine's) expressed concerns is freedom of theologians of India struggling to find new paths away from the Colonialist period India has passed through and the straight jacket of Western Theology in which they themselves were trained. Conscious of the tension between the academic and pastoral goals in the Church he made every effort to see that *Jeevadhara* was not under the direct control of any bishop or religious superior who may jump in and obstruct any new theological venture as disturbing the faith of the people. So he registered the *Jeevadhara* Theological Society so that the activities of theologians could be governed by their own regulations and through peer criticism". One can see how clearly expressed and superbly honest this statement of my view is. I could never have expressed it better. That is not all. It is the most selfless and forthright statement when you remember that it was quite the opposite of his former stand as Provincial. Selfish people choose the best things for themselves and colour their statements to legitimize their views. Chethimattam never went for the best, but chose the ordinary and the useful and shared it with all others.

My greatest friends in my field of knowledge and in the areas of my varied activities were Frs John Britto, Samuel Rayan, George Soares and Raimon Panikkar. Britto and Soares have gone to receive

their eternal reward. When I visited Fr. Britto at the Lake Shore Hospital, he said: "See, I have done what I could, now I must go". There was absolutely no trace of sorrow or fear in his face. It was so worthy of the man who had his feet firmly on the ground, giving so much light and lead to thousands of his disciples and friends, while he had his head far above the clouds with loving trust in God.

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John Britto Chethimattam: A Versatile Thinker

A. M. Mundadan

A.M. Mundadan, the well-known historian of Indian Christianity and the Professor Emeritus of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, and also a long-term colleague of J.B. Chethimattam introduces the important works and significant contributions of JBC. Chethimattam had a wide range of experience and knowledge in various disciplines, such as, philosophy, theology, indology, social sciences etc. He always aimed at a higher synthesis and none of his works is a finished product. After outlining the general orientations of JBC, the author picks up four major areas or concerns of JBC, interreligious dialogue, Christianity and other Religions, Dialogue and Evangelization and the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and highlights the main trends of his thinking in a summary way, often in the words of JBC.

A commemorative volume edited by Zacharias Thundyil and others was published on the occasion of Chethimattam's 60th birth anniversary (*Shashtyabdapurti Smârakam*)¹. Below a front page photo of Fr Britto a caption taken from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* reads: "Gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche" ("He loved to learn and he loved to teach"). A word that may qualify Chethimattam is 'prolific': prolific in reading, prolific learning, teaching, debating, writing and working. His books and articles, especially the 1996 book, *Experience and Philosophy*² are striking examples of

1 Zacharias P. Thundyil, et al, eds., *Religions in Dialogue, East and West Meet*, Linham-New York-London: University Press of America: 1985.

2 Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1996.

his wide reading and knowledge in various fields. He had a double doctorate, one from the Gregorian University, Rome and the other from the Fordham University, USA. He taught in several institutions and many faculties (in Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram and Fordham University on a permanent basis) on a variety of subjects, spoken in a number of national and international seminars and public forums. He was a master of quickly conceiving and articulating ideas and drafting them, with perfect ease. A complete bibliography of Chethimattam is yet to be drawn up. There are at least seven important books in English of international standard. A casual survey I made in 1997 reveal that he has published more than eighty-nine learned articles in English from 1957 to 1996, in more than 29 national and international periodicals, besides several in Malayalam. There are a number of others published after 1996. An untiring worker, he continued to explore new avenues and fields of research and study. He has also reviewed in different periodicals hundreds of books³.

A Philosopher Theologian in the Making

This process started at least from his student days of philosophy and theology. He was ordained priest in 1951. Even before that he began to publish. Between 1948 and 1957 he published five books in Malayalam and one in English. The last one, *The Existence of God* (1957) marks the beginning of Chethimattam's tryst with philosophical and theological endeavour.

Dr Thomas Kadankavil in his essay, "John Chethimattam: Consistency and Truth"⁴, makes an insightful analysis of Fr Britto's books and articles published till the year 1984. I am borrowing a few ideas from it. His launching out period started in 1967 with the publication of *Consciousness and Reality* (1967)⁵. This book represents Chethimattam's first serious philosophical work. This,

3 The latest tally is 14 books, 131 articles published either in journals or collected works, cf. article by James Aerathayil in this volume.

4 In Zacharias Thundy, et al, op. cit.: 1-21.

5 *Consciousness and Reality: An Indian Approach to Metaphysics*, Bangalore: 1967; London & New York: 1971.

and the writings that followed, "reflect the manifold influence to which he was open and sympathetic". The first major thrust is the deepening of the initial Christian faith and its broadening in contact with Hinduism resulting in a series of comparative studies. The second thrust was dialogue and transformation, which are reflected in the book, *Dialogue and Indian Tradition* (1969).⁶ This thrust emphasizes the need for interreligious dialogue, ecumenism and indigenous theology. The launching out years, which may also be called the more creative years (1967 onwards) convinced Chethimattam that total liberation of man and the attainment of limitless freedom is the end of all faith, religion and philosophy. Ecumenism, dialogue, and Indian theology are only passing phases in the process of a comprehensive convergence.

At the same time Fr Britto's mind became gripped with an awareness that a higher synthesis is always in the process of making and never a finished product. Our universe is "an unsynthesized, pluralistic world of experience. Religious pluralism is a universally acknowledged phenomenon in the world of today". He agreed with Paul Ricoeur that no system or method of interpretation is capable of attaining the totality of meaning it is thinking about and aiming at. A philosophy of hope ever postponing the ultimate synthesis is very much operative in the writings of Chethimattam. What he aims at is freedom, freedom in its true sense, namely freedom from misery, ignorance, and bondage, freedom for what one can genuinely be. Man's "temporal liberation is not merely a condition for his spiritual liberation but an integral part of it".

I understand that there are two stages in the upsurge of the process of theologizing in India. One is the period following the Indian Renaissance. It developed from the 19th century to early 20th century. At this stage the main players were the Protestants, both Indian and foreign. However, the contribution made by Catholic Brahmabandab Upadhyaya, whom the Church disowned, and that by the Jesuits of

6 Bangalore: 1969. This was reedited and published under the title *Patterns of Indian Thought*, London: G. Chapman & Maryknoll: Orbis, 1971. This was translated into Polish and published in 1975.

Calcutta by the movement 'To Christ through *Vedanta*' were significant. In the second half of the 20th century, especially in the wake of the climate created by the Second Vatican Council there emerged a new era, in which both Protestant and Catholic thinkers were at least equal partners. I feel that during this second stage three distinctive trends emerged in the process of theologizing in India: the spiritual-contemplative, the philosophical-theological and the socio-political.⁷ Fr Britto seems to belong to the second group, representing a strong philosophical trend.

A Constant Debater

A few years after the Council, a change, perhaps unacknowledged, was notable in the attitude of the official Church towards the new theological upsurge in India. An attitude of apathy and suspicion became very visible also in India, not to say in the universal Church. Despite such backward pulling forces many Catholic theologians took bold steps and Indian theology took great strides.⁸ John Britto Chethimattam stood in the frontline of this forward movement. His criticism against the move of some Roman officials to censure the Indian forward moving theological attempts are sufficiently well known.⁹ This brings us to one specific characteristic of this all-round theologian and versatile teacher—the tendency to debate and dispute with the positions of other thinkers, whether conservative or progressive. He was a conscientious champion of what Sankaracharya calls 'The first alms'. The first alms the Acharya would request, Fr Britto had learned, from any human being is *vādādāna*, the right to debate. Chethimattam used to raise questions against the positions of thinkers like Raymond Panikkar¹⁰, against the findings and statements of the 'Indian Theological Association'¹¹ or even those of his own colleagues in Dharmaram¹².

7 For further clarification see my book, *Paths of Indian Theology*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1998, pp. 9ff.

8 Cf. ibid.: 26f.

9 Cf. editorial to *Jeevadhara* 21 (1991) 332-38.

10 Cf. *The Indian Journal of Theology*, 23 (1979) 219-21.

11 Cf. *Jeevadhara*, 20 (1990) 241-45.

12 Cf. Chethimattam's private circulars in 1990s.

In this tendency to question and debate one could perhaps notice what I have already mentioned about the conviction of Chethimattam that a higher synthesis is always in the process of making and never a finished product. His uneasiness with established positions and his quest to go beyond settled foundations. It would be good in this context to refer to the ideas he proposes in an article written in 1979 under the title "Indian Christian Theology"¹³. In it he picks up the Indus valley figure of the unnamed and unknown horned 'god' as the embodiment of the genius of Indian history. Michael Angelo looking for a suitable piece of marble to carve the statue of David did not accept a nice block that the marble cutters offered him. He went into the quarry himself searching for the particular block, in which, he believed, David was hiding. After this introduction the writer says:

In the same way a Christian theologian in his effort to construct a theology suitable for India, cannot accept the nice ready cut blocks available in the shops, the neat systems of Scholasticism, Existential thought, Phenomenology, Liberation Theology and the like. He has to go back in history into the Indian quarry, where Christian faith is hiding in the fine-graded layers of its cultural antiquity with its specific emphasis that have characterized the Indian religious traditions.

No settled position should satisfy the true Indian theologian. He must be constantly moving backward to rediscover the ultimate ethos of Indian thought and forward to the present and future signs. I think that questioning and debating are signs of the maturing of Indian Theology. There are many instances of such a creative dialogue among Indian Christian thinkers today. Chethimattam is a forceful example of it. Questioning and debate will not allow these thinkers to sit on what they have discovered and rest but provoke them to move on. This process should continue if Indian theology is to attain further progress and maturity. In this process some exaggerations, distortions, errors or even 'heresies' are bound to occur as at the

13 Cf. *DPI Annual 1978-79*: 40-42.

time of the pioneers of Christian thought, the 'Fathers' of the Church, particularly in the 4th and 5th centuries.

Here I may refer to what Chethimattam writes in the preface of one of his major writings, *Experience and Philosophy*¹⁴. There he gives a short autobiographical note on his intellectual pilgrimage. He writes:

Personally speaking, consciousness was the focus of my philosophical pilgrimage. After my initial studies of consciousness in the Advaita of Sankara, I tried to apply that to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas to see the fundamental role, which self understanding and free decision played in supernatural merit for making humans attain final goal in beatific vision through their own proper actions. Then I studied the place of consciousness in Indian metaphysics and approaches to the same in the systems of Sankara and Ramanuja. The present book... is an attempt to expand my earlier study of the classical understanding of consciousness into the present day preoccupation with the life-world lived experience.¹⁵

In the writings of the last few years Chethimattam seems to have slowly given up the debating and argumentative approach to philosophical, religious and theological problems and emphasized the aspect of *koinonia*, communion and inter communion —*koinonia*, among the faithful of the same denomination, *koinonia* among various ecclesial communities, *koinonia* among all religious faiths. For this Chethimattam discovers enough source materials in the various scriptures, in the Eastern Christians in early East-Syrian theology, in the documents of the second Vatican Council and the pronouncements of Synod of Bishops and the Popes. The basis for this *koinonia* is the original New Testament concept of the Church as a "communion", Vatican II's presentation of the Church as "a sign and sacrament of communion with God and of unity of human kind". The Church was understood by his disciples and early Christian thinkers as the community of Jesus' followers gathered together under the invisible

14 Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1996.

15 Ibid.: xiii f.

presence of Jesus ("When two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them", Mt. 18:20). This Jesus-oriented fellowship became a movement under the dynamic guidance of the Spirit of Jesus, a movement which embraced all human kind with their varied life experiences and traditions, a movement towards the Omega point, the final revelation of the Kingdom of God.¹⁶

Specific Aspects of Chethimattam's Theology

So far I have been engaged in pointing out some of the orientations in the thinking of Chethimattam. Now we will see one or another specific aspect of his contribution to theology. As is clear from the intellectual autobiographical note quoted above it is focus on consciousness the basis of his opening out. He started exploring the treasures of Indian philosophical, religious and spiritual tradition when he was an undergraduate student of theology. It is against this background that he studied a philosophical-theological theme of Western theology represented in the scattered doctrines of St Thomas Aquinas in his doctoral dissertation "God and Man in the Supernatural Meritorious Act according to St Thomas Aquinas".¹⁷ His search into philosophy was simultaneously a search into theology and spirituality; his search for Indian wisdom is for Christian wisdom as well. Even before he started his professional teaching of theology and philosophy, the line was clear: Eastern wisdom in dialogue with Western wisdom, Christian wisdom in dialogue with other religious and philosophical thinking and practice. In the process each keeps its identity guaranteeing pluralism and variety. Such titles of some of his writings as "Towards a World Theology", "Towards a World Philosophy", "Towards a Global Morality", "A Global Ethic" are not only fascinating but are keys to enter into the thinking and vision of Chethimattam. As for the specific aspects of his theological thinking we might pick up four of them: interreligious dialogue, other religions and Christian theology, dialogue and evangelization, and uniqueness of Christ.

16 Cf. his last import book, *Towards a Theology of Intercommunion*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001.

17 This was his doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Theology, Gregorian University (1954).

Interreligious Dialogue

Perhaps this is a field, which Chethimattam has entered with great zest and profound interest. In his article, “The Spirit and Orientation of an Indian Theology”, referred to above, Chethimattam speaks of a theology for dialogue and a theology of dialogue. The former will help a partner in dialogue to be open to the other while the latter will focus on the actual encounter of the partners. Dialogue demands conversion and this is not a “one-way traffic”. The Christian needs to be converted to the religious experience of his partner belonging to another faith. Only then the Christian can ask the partner to share the Christian message of salvation.

In this respect Chethimattam does seem to agree in general with Swami Abhishiktananda and others of the spiritual-contemplative school of thought. However, in later years he went deeper into the question and has evolved his own stand. He is convinced about a crisis in interreligious dialogue today. One of its sources is the tendency to start from the premise that all religions are inadequate and partial. Dialogue then comes as an exercise in identifying the lowest common denominator on which the various religions could agree upon.¹⁸

In a rejoinder to Cardinal Tonko’s criticism of Indian theologians in the special consistory of 1991, Chethimattam says that while the Cardinal sees in the emerging theology of dialogue in India a reduction of “all religions, different religious experiences and beliefs to a least common denominator”, the Indian theologians affirm a religious pluralism which excludes the search for such a common denominator. The position of the Indian theologians, based on a real encounter with living religions, is that each religion is unique and has made unique contribution to the religious heritage of humanity. Religion is not a univocal term but analogical, standing for the ultimate concerns of human existence. The Indian theologians do not see opposition between Christocentrism and theocentrism; so too between Church and Kingdom of God as the Cardinal would have it. Christ is the Son of God and hence God. The Church is the pilgrim people continuing

18 Cf. “Nature and Scope of Interreligious Dialogue Today”, *Jeevadhara*, 21 (1991) 332f.

the mission of Christ received from the Father to establish the Kingdom. Hence there is no Christocentrism without theocentrism and vice versa. There is no Church unless she is at the service of the Kingdom of God.¹⁹

Other Religions and Christian Theology

This aspect is in a way a further explication of the one just described. In his article, "The Christian Hermeneusis and other Religions"²⁰ Chethimattam shows how hermeneusis of Christianity underwent various shifts, even radical shifts, in the history of its encounter with newer and newer socio-cultural and religious situations: from the Jewish to the Greco-Roman, then to the Middle Ages, and then to the modern period. We are living at present in the post-modern era, which demands a hermeneutics beyond exclusivism and inclusivism. Exclusivism claims that salvation is through Christ and that too by belonging in some manner, to the Church he founded; inclusivism affirms that Christ is in some way available also to the followers of other religions, e.g., 'the anonymous Christian' of K. Rahner, 'the unknown Christ of Hinduism' of R. Panikkar. The primary question is how believers of other faiths can come to know Christ and become persuaded to accept him.

The first and basic question is what the meaning of Christ is for all human beings. In Jesus of Nazareth something happened that altered human history, for all humans whether they know it or not. If the incarnation is the entry of the Son of God into the human history he is the Lord of history and his central role in that history is a fact which affects the lives of all.

Perhaps in these words one may detect the exclusivist tendency. But the writer goes further when he states:

This is true in certain sense of all historical events, which in one way or another affect all subsequent human history. Christ's death and resurrection was decisive for all humanity. One should say that in an analogous manner the life and death

19 Cf. editorial *Jeevadharma*, 21 (1991) 332f.

20 Cf. *Jeevadharma*, 21 (1991) 339-64.

of Socrates was decisive...the illumination of Buddha... set the wheel of dharma in movement for the whole human race... the hegira of Mohammed was decisive. Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, Jesus Christ and Mohammed are not isolated figures nor are the religious traditions, which they inspired, parallel encounters of human salvation. They are integral parts of the one economy of salvation, and the decisive contribution each one of them made should be recognized as such. Yet each one of them is unique and different and has a different meaning for humanity. The question, therefore, is not which of them is right and which wrong, but rather what specific contribution each one of them makes towards the realization of the ultimate concerns of human beings.²¹

The unique contribution of Christianity is human fellowship centred in the Son of God. The risen Christ present in the midst of his people calls and gathers together all human beings as brothers and sisters. They share in his own spirit and address the Father as Abba. The essence of Christianity is Christ, the Son of God made man. Thus the human nature has for its 'self' the person of the Son of God. This human nature becomes capable of providing "a new head for human race, and a focal point for human history, transforming it into salvation history".

Here the question arises whether this 'new' process in nature and history a conscious one as far as persons of other faiths are concerned. If not, is not Chethimattam admitting the exclusivist position mentioned above? As for Christians it is their faith consciousness but not for others.

The conclusion of the article again stresses the point that the unique contribution of Christianity in no way contradicts the unique emphases of other religions: the covenantal focus of Judaism, the obedient faith as well as prophetism of Islam, the deep interiority of Hinduism and the universal compassion and friendship of Buddhism. "The basic question of religious hermeneutics is not: which religion is right and which is wrong, which is superior and which is inferior, which is

21 Ibid.: 358f.

more developed and which underdeveloped." Rather we should ask what unique concern each religion addresses itself to; what contribution does it make to the religious experience of humanity today.

Christianity lays claim to acceptance by all humanity. If so, it should explain the place and positive role of other religions in the total plan of human salvation.

One cannot do full justice to what God said and did in Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity without seeing the Christian Revelation in the context of what God said and did in other nations and at other times. Since Christians form only less than one third of humanity, they cannot afford to ignore how God takes care of the salvation of the rest two thirds. This is particularly true of the millennia old Scriptures of other religious traditions, which were composed by holy men not without the special help and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.²²

In these explanations what emerges is the fact of a tension, a tension between the traditional position of the Church with regard to the uniqueness and universality of the Christ-event and a theologian's living experience of the specific nature and contribution of the various religions.

Chethimattam is struggling to strike a balance, which may render this tension creative and liberative. The new hermeneutics is the way towards bringing about this balanced approach. On the one hand Christian faith tells us that the Christ-event has positively and definitively affected all humanity and its history, all human life, all religious experience. On the other hand those who live in close and constant contact with people of other faiths, other world visions (this is the actual situation of Indian theologians), feel that the uniqueness of the experience of each of other faiths and ideologies have to be maintained and respected. He thinks that many Western theologians, especially the officials of the Roman Curia, lack the experience, which theologians in India have gained through direct contact with other religions. The former lack adequate information and hence competence to deal with the complex interreligious issues of today.

It would have been much helpful if they, instead of publishing unilateral reactive statements (e. g. those on Eastern Meditation, Liberation Theology, the panicky statements made by Cardinal Tonko in the extraordinary consistory of 1991), gave creative and imaginative leadership to the theologians concerned.

Chethimattam wants the theologians even to go beyond Vatican II. He is of the view that Vatican Council II's teaching on religions is inadequate. The Council seems to go only as far as to say that there are also *some* rays of truth in other religious traditions—a condescending and even offensive attitude. Such teachings of the Council does not measure up to some of the basic principles recognized by the same Council in *Dignitatis humanae* (Freedom of Religion) and *Ad gentes* (Role of the Church in the History of the World).

Dialogue and Evangelization

Interreligious dialogue and evangelization or mission are according to Chethimattam, two complementary functions of faith. "Dialogue asks each one: 'tell us how God has disclosed himself to you?' Mission says: 'this is how God has revealed to us, and what he said and did may be relevant also of you'". The writer further expounds this idea. Dialogue is used to elicit the faith of other peoples. It is not a means for conversion but "an effort to make other faiths intelligible in their own right, and in that way make our faith more intelligible and relevant for ourselves and others". In this effort there is an acknowledgement of "the finiteness of all human traditions even with regard to the most fundamental truths". Through evangelization we communicate the Good News that God has radically changed human history by the incarnation of His Son. We offer our service to gather together all human beings into a new worshipping community. In the process of evangelisation the Church must avoid "the extremes of imperialism and relativism".

While imperialism seeks to impose a uniform external structure on everyone, relativism takes all religious symbols as equal. Relativism fails to take seriously and communicate the unique salvific message that is drawn from and centres around the body and blood of the risen Christ.²³

Uniqueness of Christ

Chethimattam's philosophical basis for theologizing is the Trinitarian substratum: *Aham-tvam-tat*, which is very much linked to consciousness focus.

The internal experience of the Spirit acting in us as the *Aham* (our real 'I'), and the encounter with the world as the *Tvam* (Thou, the true Word) become unified in the supreme reality of the Father, the real *Tat*.²⁴

Connected to it he makes another statement:

In this unified vision one is not primarily concerned with the historical Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, who appeared at a particular point on the globe. What is important is his being the summary and sum total of the external expression of the individual divinity, a climatic point for the exteriorisation of the interior experience. For this Krishna or Buddha may play the role of Christ. History and precision will be called for only when attention is directed to the structure of the external experience located in time and space.²⁵

Felix Wilfred after citing this passage notes: "One cannot but be struck by what the author says about Jesus of Nazareth". Then he asks: "Does he [Chethimattam], like Panikkar whom he criticizes on this point, water down the historical particularity and concreteness of Incarnation? Does he, perhaps, advocate the view that Christ is one among the manifestations of the Divine?"²⁶

The above puzzling statement made in an article Fr Britto wrote in 1971 has to be contrasted with another one found in an article written in 1977, "Theology of Evangelization". Chethimattam asserts:

23 "The Christian Hermeneutics...", *Jeevadhara*, 21 (1991) 364; cf. also "Theology and Evangelization", *ibid.*, 7 (1977).

24 *Jeevadhara*, 1 (1971) 455.

25 "The Spirit and the Orientation of an Indian Theology", *ibid.* 455f.

26 Cf. *Beyond Settled Foundations*, Madras: Depart of Christian Studies, University of Madras, 1993: 123.

Christian missionary activity is event-centred communicating to all men what happened to them in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not just one expression of the presence and activity of the divine Logos like several others such as Buddha, Mahavira, Confucius or Mohammed but unique as the focal point of human history at which the divine Logos integrated himself with all human history through the incarnation and the redemptive Resurrection.²⁷

How are we to understand these apparently contradicting or ambivalent statements? Felix Wilfred gives this answer: Chethimattam's position seems to be nuanced. Starting from the interior experience and vision, he speaks of the historical exteriorisation of the Divine mystery in Jesus of Nazareth, leaving open, the possibility for more such manifestations and therefore not limiting it only to this particular manifestation.

Wilfred explains this point further. He thinks that underlying Chethimattam's thought there is dialectic between universality and particularity, just as between the interior and the exterior. There is one common humanity of all people and hence a convergence of all human in a transcendent and universal unity. At the same time the particular has its concrete historical specificity, which an ultimate transcendent unity cannot do away with. It is in this dialectical relationship of the universal and the particular the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is to be affirmed.²⁸

Chethimattam says that uniqueness is not necessarily having something, which no one else has. "Unique is what in a special manner realizes in itself something that is universally caller for."²⁹ Christ, the Son of God made man becomes the 'self' of the human nature, and provides "a new head for human race, and a focal point for human history, transforming it into salvation history".³⁰ In this salvation history or one economy of salvation centred in Jesus Christ

27 "Theology and Evangelization...", *Jeevadhara*, 7 (1977) 386f.

28 Wilfred, op. cit.: 123.

29 "Towards a World Theology: An Interreligious Approach to Theological Issues", in Thundy and others, op. cit.: 314.

each religious experience has a particular role and place, a unique contribution to make.

Is this a clear affirmation of the uniqueness of Christ as generally understood or does there remain some vagueness still? Chethimattam's understanding of the uniqueness of Christ is nuanced and is somewhat different from how it is understood in the Western tradition. Perhaps he is more forthcoming in defending the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity in some of the controversies he has provoked. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is to be understood, according to his last book, *Towards a theology of Intercommunion* in terms of universal *koinonia* or intercommunion as seen above. This aspect is again emphasized in one of his last writings where he says: "Called together by the Risen Christ at the Eucharistic table, through Word and Sacrament it reaches out to all humanity in order to transform the world itself into God's Kingdom and active fellowship of all saints...Jesus Christ is the common heritage of all humans".³¹

Conclusion

There are many nuances and subtleties, and perhaps even ambiguities and generalizations, in the various theological statements of John Chethimattam. In order to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of his thinking, a much deeper and a vaster analysis of his writings, than what I have done is necessary. This is a challenge to our budding philosophers and theologians I would call upon our younger generation to respond to the challenge of further exploration and deeper studies into the various aspects of Chethimattam's philosophical and theological thinking, some of which I mentioned above. That would be not only a great honour to Fr John Britto Chethimattam but even more a significant contribution to Christian thought in India.

Jeevas
Aluva

30 "The Christian Hermeneutics...", art. cit.: 362.

31 Cf. article, "Constructing an Indian Ecclesiology", *Third Millennium*, V (2002) 66.

Approaches to Philosophy, Indian and Western : A Philosophy of Dialogue

Thomas Kadankavil

John Chethimattam's life was in a way a philosophical pilgrimage. Thomas Kadankavil, the Professor Emeritus of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, who studied under JBC and later worked with him as his colleague traces here in this article the philosophical journey of JBC. Chethimattam all through his life emphasized the differences in the Indian and Western approaches to Philosophy and Metaphysics and highlighted the merits of Indian approach through interiority. Indian approach and Indian culture provides a promising framework. Only in and through one's own subjectivity can one approach the world of conscious beings. One cannot understand another unless he/she becomes in some way identified with the other, and his/her faith is treated as one's own faith. Disillusioned both with Modernity and Postmodernity JBC finally proposes Mysticism, not as the end, but as the root of all philosophy and religion and so one will naturally have to fall back on silence in highest wisdom.

1. Introduction

In the literary and teaching career and colloquies spreading over almost four decades of Prof. John B. Chethimattam the constant refrain unmistakably was dialogue and words congruent with it such as shifting perspectives, paradigm shift, plurality of ways of thinking, western and eastern approaches, differing thought patterns and the like. He declares from the very outset in his masterpiece

Consciousness and Reality (1967) the aim of his life project without any ambiguity: "In recent times the East-West religious dialogue has gained momentum... But, what often stands in the way of a mutual appreciation of the religious positions is the radical difference in philosophical thought patterns between East and West... The scope of this book is to explain briefly the physiognomy of Indian thought in contrast to the Western mode of thought."¹ After an elapse of thirty-six years he again wrote: "To discuss different philosophical issues according to a single paradigm is to fail philosophy itself... Should we not move away from the traditional Aristotelian hylemorphic conception of human nature to a multidimensional approach to man?"²

A teacher by profession he asks how is it practically possible to teach philosophy in our seminaries taking the radically different paradigms and different issues and methods underlying the different traditions. He proposes to plan a comprehensive text book embracing the different paradigms which he himself recognizes as a cumbersome and time –consuming project which may not be at the end useful to the students, as today's students coming to our philosophy programmes are young adults and beyond the age of text books. Another suggestion is to compose an anthology of selections from outstanding authors on each Philosophical issue.³ This is also problematic when we think of the beginners in philosophical study who have no training in abstract and coordinated thinking. This is not to suggest that even at the close of his career Prof. Chethimattam was left clueless about the method to be adopted in teaching philosophy, but that he has left the task to us to pursue.

2. Consciousness and Reality

1) With the zeal and the enthusiasm of a crusader of new project Prof. Chethimattam entered in the field of East-West religious dialogue 'providing himself as well as his readers a right understanding of the metaphysical (philosophical) genius of India.' The book

1 *Consciousness and Reality: An Indian Approach to Metaphysics*, Dharmaram College, Bangalore, 1967, iii.

2 Augustine Thottakara, (ed), *Philosophical Education in Indian Seminaries*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2003, 16.

Consciousness and Reality is on the metaphysical positions taken by Sankara and Ramanuja, comparing and contrasting them with the Western main stream philosophy running down from Plato and Aristotle through Augustine and Aquinas.

Parmenides, the philosopher of the early Greek Philosophy is considered to be the first to deal with the world of experience under the transcendental aspect of being. Ever since 'being' became the central point of speculation, raising questions about the existence of absolute and relative realities and absolute and relative truths.

St. Thomas brought the evolution of metaphysical thought in the West to a certain fulfillment by pinpointing the act of existence as the core of reality. This act of existing points to "the First Being, which is simply the act of existing." (p.4). In the question for an ideal reality, or First Being the Indian tradition has chosen the conscious self rather than the objective world. Whatever being the starting point of speculation, for both traditions 'being' has become the focal point of attention in the metaphysical search.

With the question whether the being is one or many we come across with the most crucial metaphysical problem for both Western and Eastern Philosophy. When the Thomistic Philosophy speaks of contingent beings and necessary being (*Actus Purus*), the Indian traditions refer to *paramarthika satta* (absolute being) and *pratibhasika* and *vyavaharika satta* (illusory/relative beings) among the existents. Of the three main metaphysical theories, namely, Non-dualism, dualistic and qualified non-dualist views, Prof. Chethimattam chooses the last one referred to here for comparison and contrast with Western metaphysics. Concerning this he writes: "This third trend of thought found in the Upanishads formed the Vedic background for the Metaphysics of Ramanuja. He strove to save the value of the relative and finite world, human personality, and the usefulness of religion and personal devotion to the Supreme Lord, the personal God."³

3 Cfr. Ibid. P.17, 18.

4 *Consciousness and Reality: An Indian Approach to Metaphysics*, Dharmaram College, Bangalore, 1967, p.19.

2) According to Sankara the inquiry is undertaken because true knowledge being the realization that Brahman is the unique and absolute reality, beside which everything else is non-real (*anrta*), non-Knowledge (*avidya*) and illusion (*maya*). Internal teleology of nature for attaining liberation in the plenitude of consciousness is the common doctrine of Hindu schools. This epistemological position is inadequate to understand the vision of Sanakara. Ramanuja gives the best statement about the basic position of Sankara as follows: "Brahman alone, who is pure intelligence and hostile to all characterizing attributes, is real; all other things than Him...are merely assumed to exist in Him, and are unreal."⁵ Looking from the side of Brahman, absolute, immutable and infinite consciousness, it is clear that there cannot be anything real outside of or beside it.

Prof. Chethimattam was very careful to avoid the accusation against him that he sidetracked Sankara to take Ramanuja as his point of contrast and comparison of basic points of Metaphysics in the Western and Indian thought. According to him "the apparently irreconcilable opposition between them is mostly owing to a lack of comprehension of the other side's outlook and presuppositions. For them both the highest point of reality is not subsistence or existence (being) but consciousness, which is pure luminosity and transparency. Once this is understood it could be seen that their positions are not contradictory but rather complementary. Even then Prof. Chethimattam sides with Ramanuja, as it is evident from the following summary statement:

Hence the basic difference between Sankara and Ramanuja is that the former evaluates reality from the side of Supreme Reality, absolute consciousness, while the latter looks at the Supreme Person from the side of the finite person. It is idle to argue that Sankara's point of vision is a higher and more perfect one. For, his basis for taking such an angle is a fiction: he is arguing 'as if' one had already attained Brahma-realization. But this assumption is not a happy one: for, if one has attained that realization, there is no more need for any inquiry; if one

pretends to have attained the realization, that itself is a sure sign that he has not attained it. Ramanuja has at least no need of a fiction; he has his feet on firm ground.⁶

3. Reconstruction of a True Metaphysics with the Positive Points in Ramanuja

(i) He elaborated the problems of metaphysics from a rational point of view. He holds that even scripture can be understood only by reasoning. If a conflict should arise between the two reason should be preferred.

(ii) He starts from conscious experience analyzing and applying the pattern of consciousness to the world of reality. Here he uses not abstraction, but integration as the right method.

(iii) Since Vedantic tradition does not recognize creation of things from nothing, Ramanuja took the view that finite reality as eternally subsisting around Brahman, the absolute, unique reality.

(iv) As regards the causal relation between Brahman and the finite realities neither the *asatkaryavada* of Nyaya-Vaisesikas or *satkaryavada* of Samkhya-Yoga school is acceptable to Ramanuja. For him the reality of causality is not in the cause, but in the effect, which is dependent on the cause for what it is and what it has. What is involved here is a relation between two stages of things, a prior causal state and a subsequent effected state. Here the analogical conception of being seems to be accepted.

(v) The emphasis on personality gives a new aspect to his whole philosophy, especially to moral and spiritual values. The end knowledge is not an 'It' but first an 'I' the one who knows and then finally the 'Thou,' the Supreme Person in whom alone I find my fullness and fulfillment.

4. In Search of the One from Consciousness

The first four *sutras* of *Brahma Sutra* of Badarayana is said to make a survey of reality with a certain compact unity. The *sutras* are: *athato Brahamjijnasa* (then, therefore, the inquiry into Brahman), *janmadyasya yatah* (that from which the origin etc.),

sastrayonitvat (since scripture is the source), *tattu samanvayat* (and that on account of the connection)). “This gives us the principal problems of metaphysics: the problem of the One and the many, namely the existence of the Supreme Being and the analogy of being, the problem of causality, the problem of the transcendental properties of being, and finally notion of personality and the interpersonal relation including moral values.”⁷

5. Plurality of Metaphysics

Metaphysics is the science of reality. Being a science “it is situated at the meeting point of consciousness and reality. As the conscious mode of approach so is the aspect of reality attained. Consciousness manifests itself on different levels, it sounds different depths of reality too” (*Consciousness and Reality*, p.105). The two poles in consciousness are the subject-consciousness and the object-consciousness, which become united in a knowing subject. *The assumption of Prof. Chethimattam is that the approach from the awareness of the existence of I-consciousness would open a new dimension of reality, if not a better and complementary one to the Western approach to the metaphysical problems from object-consciousness.* The book is an attempt to substantiate this theoretical position on the metaphysical assumptions of Ramanuja’s philosophy.

The western method is taken as the approach from rational analysis, and the Indian position as the approach from the angle of consciousness. Though a number of contrasting elements are enumerated representing the two worldviews, at the end the author is not very sure where to turn. His language betrays his predilection for the Indian approach from the angle of consciousness. We shall see what he has to say about the concept of God:

Even in the approach to God each tradition shows its particular attitude. For the Greeks God, the Supreme Being is the climax of the cosmic order. Hence he is conceived as the One, the unifying point of everything, the absolute Good and Beauty from which everything else gets its share. Even the Five ways of St. Thomas has not deviated significantly from this pattern.

The personal aspect of God in Christianity is a patrimony from Judaic monotheism and the Revelation given us by Christ.

Approach to God from Consciousness interiorizes God. God, who is called Brahman, the one who is really big, the all, is also the Atman, the real self of every being. An exteriorized God is no God, but a mere phenomenon, at best a symbol of the divine with only a psychological and pedagogical value (p.247).

Prof. Chethimattam seems to strongly react to the conception of an exteriorized God out there, which he had argued out to himself when as a scholar he wrote his book on the five ways of St. Thomas to prove the existence of God.

The intuitional preference he had to the Indian approach also was not sufficiently clarified as he himself admits, nor was he deeply committed to it. His own admissions prove our claim: "In this divergence of approaches the final question is not one of truth and error, right and wrong. Besides, it may take a more detailed study of individual points to pass the judgment of right and wrong about each point in its proper context" (p.248). "On the other hand consciousness presents reality in one's own self, within reach of immediate understanding. But it tends to forget distinctions and smooth out and obliterate the limits which define the finite in contrast to the Infinite" (p.249).

The purpose Prof. Chethimattam had in mind might be discerned in the following words: "What is important is to recognize that the two approaches are from different angles, and hence they are not contradictory but rather complementary (p.248). It may be also futile to ask which approach is better. Both have their strong points and weakness (p.249).

He makes an earnest call for tolerance of diverse Metaphysical approaches and views about the ultimate reality. "In the light of unattainable goal of direct vision every system of thought and formulation appears inadequate, *nevertheless to be tolerated for the partial vision it contains*" (p. 244). With this plea he concludes: "Hence the best procedure may be to maintain their proper character, and keep up the dialogue that makes them complement each other and correct each other's defects" (p.249).

6. Philosophical Hermeneutics⁸

After the elapse of a long fifteen years Prof. Chethimattam came up with reflection on Philosophical hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is primarily a search for meaning and the general hermeneutics was always the special concern of philosophy. He writes: "The language school of India with thinkers like Bhartrhari and Patanjali raises the question as to how in the multiplicity of letters and words and diversity of sounds, voices, pitches and accents a single meaning could be communicated, and in answer postulates a single, spiritual meaning-bearing entity called *sphota* behind the complexity of words and sounds" (p.64-65). In this article he presents the different theories in dialectical correlation so that their complementarities may be easily perceived. Hermeneutics has certain open-ended character. It goes on expanding and developing the capacity for understanding.

Most of the hermeneutical philosophies of the West do not provide any clear approach to the transcendent. Our author writes: "Western Philosophy was not particularly interested in the religious question apart from investigating the rational proofs for the existence of God. Religious scriptures in the West started with supposing the positive revelation of God in history, and hence, were more the object of theological hermeneutic than of philosophy. On the other hand, in Eastern religious traditions, in which even divine revelation is a matter of personal experience, how human words could convey divine experience was always a crucial question" (p.77). To this question the author himself gives the answer: "The easiest and most obvious answer in the matter was that Scripture has as its goal the direct experience of God. For, Scripture itself is the direct experience sages had of Divine Reality, translated by them into human words to help others to attain by themselves the same experience. Human words serve only as a simple invitation to turn inwards to the interior of one's own being, there to experience directly the presence of the Divine as the Self of one's own self" (p.77). Here Prof. Chethimattam clearly shows his preference to the Eastern approach to religious and metaphysical issues and language.

8 *Journal of Dharma*, "Philosophical Hermeneutics," Vol. V, No.1, (January-March) 1980, pp. 64-79.

7. Sankara's Theological Method⁹

The author writes: "The problem is how one can proceed from the extreme of misery and ignorance to the fullness of knowledge and bliss. For Sankara this is the scope and meaning of *Brahma*-inquiry, which is theology and philosophy at the same time" (p.90). "Sankara's method of procedure is to analyze bondage and ignorance and to show that what is positive in them is consciousness itself, which has to be liberated by the removal of the factors that hide and distort it" (p.90). "From the vantage-point of human consciousness Sankara examines all reality. For him reality is not something imposed on thought as its object, something thrown against it, something standing out there totally detached from and independent of human knowledge. According to him the point of departure for any investigation of reality is the reality of the human knower himself, which is the presupposition for any knowledge" (p.98).

8. Possibility of Inter-Faith Dialogue¹⁰

The article 'Atman and Vishnu' depicts Hinduism as a religion, which was in constant change accepting new ideas from other religious traditions. Hinduism met the challenges raised by Jainism and Buddhism by absorbing the basic values and attitudes presented by them like strict vegetarianism, respect for all life summarized in the principle of *ahimsa* and concern for the dignity of all human beings. Later, Hinduism had to encounter other religions like the Zoroastrianism of the Parsis, Islam and Christianity. Even then it was able to maintain its identity because, according to Prof. Chethimattam "it placed the emphasis on certain basic religious insights which could not be questioned by other religious traditions but were tacitly recognized as basic to all religions." Two of such experiences are... "experience of an ultimate ground of all reality

9 *Unique and Universal, Fundamental Problems of an Indian Theology*, 'Sankara's Theological Method,' ed. J.B. Chethimattam, Dharmaram College, Bangalore, 1972, pp. 3-12.

10 *Meeting of Religions: New Orientations and Perspectives*, ed. Thomas A. Aykara, 'Atman and Vishnu: Hindu Insights for Inter-Faith dialogue,' Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1978, pp.135-155.

designated as Atman, and the vision of a sublime ideal of humanity in the figure of Vishnu. These two constitute the theological (metaphysical) and anthropological poles of all religious experience in which all religions can discover their basic unity as well as the areas where each one can make its own unique contribution" (p.136). After a long discourse on these concepts and similar ones in Christianity and other religions the author concludes thus:

Hence the different religions cannot be looked upon as closed systems to be compared with each other, but rather as ongoing movements that endeavour to arrive at a deeper understanding of the divine reality.... It is wrong, therefore, to conceive Christ, Vishnu or Buddha as rivals or mere partial expressions of the one divine Logos, in the sense that Christ is good only for Christians, Vishnu for the Hindus and Buddha for Buddhists. The function of inter-faith dialogue is not to dilute or explain away the two basic facts of religious experience, but to see how these different insights and perspectives enrich and complement each other (p.153).

The author wrote these lines almost three decades ago when he had much hope in the prospects of inter-faith dialogue.

9. Reconciling with Religious Pluralism¹¹

The Christian approach to Indian culture has to be both critical and positive. Indian culture is not identified with any particular religion or ideology, because it took shape along with all the religions of the land, which assumed their present form in the course of time. We have to take India as providing a framework in which any particular world-vision can be articulated, a religious horizon in which any faith can express itself. Hence Prof. Chethimattam admonishes the Christians to look upon other religions not as the faith of 'other' but rather as their own faith which perhaps they might have forgotten or neglected. All religions stand in need of self-correction. Our author writes: "Christianity and Islam, coming from other cultures, have to shed their alienness. The emptiness doctrine of Buddhism has to open

11 *Church in Context*, ed. Francis Kanichikattil, 'Indian Culture and the Christian Civilization,' Dharmaram Publications. 1996, pp. 139-152.

itself to the positive vision of the 'illumined.' Hinduism, bound within the narrow confines of caste-mentality, stage-morality and mechanical *karma-samsara* has to open to the definitive character of the present moment to decide one's eternity. Religions can function meaningfully and fruitfully in India only in constant interaction with India's religious culture" (p.152). The religious pluralism is a God given gift to us and we are called to live with it in harmony and peace.

10. The Reality of Multi-Culturality¹²

While analyzing the possibility of interculturality of Philosophy and religion Prof. Chethimattam acknowledged that "there was a real productive synthesis between the Aryan tradition and South Indian Dravidian tradition" in India (p.172). The Hindu Christian dialogue began in a real, positive sense only when a group of prominent Hindus such as Raja Rammohan Roy, Kesub Chunder Sen, Kali Charan Banerjee (later Brahmabandhah Upadhyaya) took earnest steps to reform Hinduism according to the ideals of Christianity (p.177). Our author writes: "In a seminar held in Madras in December 1956 titled "India and the Fullness of Christ" the theme was what India could contribute to Christian self-understanding and what Christians could contribute to India. There was already an ongoing investigation led by Johanns, Dandoy and others to use Vedanta as an hermeneutical tool for the interpretation of Christianity, as Thomas Aquinas had made use of Aristotelian Philosophy" (p.178).

One of the important questions that came up among the Christian thinkers in intercultural discussions was the appropriate methodology for such a philosophical encounter. Prof. Chethimattam proposes a method, which comes closer to the concept of empathy-relationship St. Edith Stein analyzed in her doctrinal dissertation. After referring to all possible methods of encounter the author makes his own suggestion in the following statement:

Here the only possibilities are exclusivism, which says that I am right and everyone else wrong; or inclusivism which sees

12 *Interculturality of Philosophy and Religion, 'The Multi-Culturality of Indian Philosophy'* ed. Gregory D'Souza, NBCLC, Bangalore, 1996, pp. 163-181.

all other opinions as included in mine or pluralism, according to which all philosophies are parallel paths to the same summit. More congenial is the Indian methodology, which makes human suffering its point of departure and views everything in terms of consciousness. Only in and through one's own subjectivity can one approach the world of conscious beings. I cannot understand another unless I become in some way identified with him, and his faith is treated as my own faith. But this tends to certain individualism, and one has to explore the possibility of expanding philosopher's world into a world of the 'we' rather than that of the isolated 'I' or the impersonal 'It' (p.179, 180).

What is really missing here from what Edith Stein brought out is perhaps the real encounter of the seeker at the emotional level with his partner in dialogue. It could be argued that it is implied in the universal hospitality in dialogue he advocated towards all genuine seekers of truth and reality.

11. Mapping the Milestones in Self-Formation¹³

The article 'My Encounter with Indian Philosophy' is an autobiographical note of Prof. Chethimattam on his philosophical and theological formation from the Indian side. He depicts himself as a member of a Christian community, which takes pride in its Nambudiri heritage of Sanskrit, and as one having a basic acquaintance with the Western Scholastic philosophy headed by St. Thomas Aquinas. Hence he confesses that his Christian study of Indian philosophy is to a great extent set by the concerns of Western Philosophy.

Role of Matter: To the question how can one play a positive role in the material world which is regarded as mere *maya* in the highest Indian Philosophical tradition of India, Fr. Chethimattam has the following answer: "The Christian answer to the problem was the incarnational principle: only a philosophy from below could resolve the issue. When we start from the side of the infinite and immutable divinity, the finite material world has nothing to add. But if we start

13 *Christian Contribution to Indian Philosophy*, ed. Anand Amaladass, 'My Encounter with Indian Philosophy,' Madras, CLs, 1995, pp. 17-37.

from below and look at the world as the fullness of Christ, ...the world has a real meaning. This has exemplified for Christian believers in the mysteries of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary, the Mother of Christ" (p.18). This shows how Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, an ordinary human person could raise matter itself to divine glory.

A Higher order of Integrative Experience: Hinduism is a natural religion and culture embodying, in its various forms, spiritual and intellectual experience and insights of a higher order. It can even now be used to generate the same higher order of integrating experience (*anubhava*) in our souls. "A fully developed and fully discovered self is the goal of our philosophical search. In fact, the central concern of education is to render each one a unique, free, responsible human being and to create a better world by constructive social change" (p.19).

Methodology: As to the methodology to be used he writes: "(The) Indian preference for consciousness as the starting point of metaphysics rather than the wonder at the natural phenomena out there formed the point of departure from Greek Philosophy" (p.20). To give support to this preference he refers to Edmund Husserl who complained in one of his last works that objectivism is the original sin for which the West is condemned to cultural sterility (p.20). For the metaphysical discussion on transcendental level of consciousness JBC chose Vedantic interpretation as the model. He writes: "Though there are good many Vedantic interpretations of this pure *cit*, the authentic Indian answer to the question is in a synthesis between the opposing positions of Sankara and Ramanuja. This is analogous to the situation in Western Philosophy, which all through the centuries has been basically a tug of war between Plato and Aristotle" (p.20). He emphatically defended this preference he gave to Vedantic methodology:

The pride of Indian Philosophical tradition is the Vedanta school of thought. Over against Greek philosophy, which takes a purely objectivist and detached interest in the world of material things to be exploited for the satisfaction of human needs, Vedanta

ascribes priority to human consciousness of suffering, bondage and aspiration for liberation. While for the Greeks human person was just an individual among a mass of individuals, a mere substance, Vedanta started with the conscious self as the core of human personality. In today's world where the highest priority is ascribed to gaining and safeguarding the freedom and dignity of every human being the discussion of human consciousness would be the primary task of philosophy (p.23).

Drawback of Objective Analysis: With equal force he finds fault with Western and Christian objective analytical approach to Hinduism. He writes: "The God of Aristotle, as such is no God of religion. Religion means not simply cognition but recognition, not abstraction but realization, not simply understanding, but intelligent submission to the Final End" (p.24). The objective approach produced a fundamentally unyielding world vision. Prof. Chethimattam quotes Freud approving his view:

Freud defined this Western *Weltanschauung* as 'an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis which, accordingly, leaves no question unanswered and in which everything that interests us finds its fixed place.' On the other hand, the wondrous reality of the East is a plethora of questions, a mosaic of tongues and eyes, the delightful absence of a fixed focus: a vision at once pluralistic and all encompassing (pp.25, 26).

His opposition to the logo-centric or overarching narrative, a tendency rampant in all varieties of modern metaphysical theories, made him at least, as we shall see later, a fellow traveler of postmodernists.

Interreligious Philosophy and Dialogue: Indian tradition does not make much of a difference between philosophy and religion. For the meeting of the religions and Philosophy dialogue is the only way left for us. He writes:

Hence dialogue among different philosophical traditions is vital for harmony among different religions. Dialogue is not

concession or a luxury. Spontaneously growing dialogue among religions brings out a long neglected dimension of man: his dialogal psychic structure, which contemporary philosophical thinking and religious experience have brought into focus. Psychologically the human self is dialogal; all authentic human activity is dialogue. Poetry is dialogue with the world; love is dialogue with others, and prayer is dialogue with God. Openness to other people in dialogue should be based on the wholeness and integrity of the person. Person unifies in himself two complementary tendencies: one directed towards the concentration and mastery of self, and the other to expansion and gift of self to others. Self-possession and self-gift constitute the rhythm of personal life (p.26).

Concept of State Religion and Hindu Nationalism: There are good many in India today who want to build a Hindu India. But the irony of this new stand of Hindu nationalism is that it by itself is a denial of Hindutva as a cultural perspective. The basic understanding of Hindutva is that it starts with an inner realization of the One-without-a-second and is tolerant of all the different expressions of that ineffable experience. What unites all believers is faith (p.28). Prof. Chethimattam writes further:

The establishment of a state religion, even if it is the religion of the majority of the population, will hurt the cause of human society and its harmonious working. A Christian state, a Hindu *rashtra* or a government based on the Qur'an will mean that all activity be subordinated to a single ideology. The argument that the followers of a particular religion constitute the permanent majority of the state and that those who rule represent the majority is not valid. For, in democratic functioning, majorities are constituted anew on each major issue and those who constitute the majority may vary each time and are drawn from all ranges of identity – religious, social, economic and political. Hence the notion of a permanent majority defined by religion or any other ideology like Marxism is undemocratic and can be effective only when it is violent (pp.27, 28).

The Goal of Dialogue: Dialogue need not necessarily end in common understanding and agreed way of action. Concerning this the author writes: "Since no one wants to admit a total defeat for one side and victory for the other, often dialogues end in a polite agreement to disagree – each of the partners leaving with hidden complaisance in one's own truth and a condescending sympathy for the ignorance of the others. The way out of this impasse is to go back to the original context of such formulations, to the field of one's interaction and transaction with one's fellow human beings, where morality is actually lived and faith exercised in the service of others" (p.31).

Philosophy of Hope: No amount of even honest effort can fuse and merge the two approaches to metaphysical problems in the East and the West into a unified whole. Prof. Chethimattam writes: "But there is no way that the two philosophies can be brought to a synthesis as equal partners in a world vision. Our universe is "an unsynthesized, pluralistic world of experience. Philosophical and religious pluralism is universally acknowledged phenomenon in the world of today." "Any theory or conceptual framework is only an inadequate abstraction from this ineffable-life-experience" (p.32). Hence Prof. Chethimattam writes: "No system or method of interpretation is capable of attaining the totality of meaning it is thinking about and aiming at. What we can do, as Paul Ricoeur has suggested, is to create 'a third way' of approach in the form of 'a limit idea,' by opposing the two sides of polarity by a philosophy of hope postponing a synthesis between them, thus limiting philosophy itself (p.33).

12. From Rationalism to Mysticism

Postmodernity vs. Modernity:¹⁴ Prof. Chethimattam writes that 'death of modernity came with the realization that science could not solve all problems' (p.258). By death of modernity the author understands the challenges to one or the other system of thought, which was so far regarded as unassailable from a rational point of view. This new era of challenge in the epistemological and

14 'The Post-Modern Response to the Death of Modernity,' in *Western Encounter With Indian Philosophy*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2002, pp.257-281.

metaphysical field is believed to be initiated by the onslaught of postmodernist thinking. Modernity is understood as the domination of asceticism, secularization, the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality, the strict differentiation of various spheres of life-world, the bureaucratization of economics, political and military practices and growing monetarization of values. Modernity therefore arises with the spread of western imperialism in Europe.¹⁵ On the other hand David Harvey gives the following definition to Postmodernity: 'An incredulity towards meta-narratives and a challenge to totalizing discourses, which is a suspicion of any discursive attempts to offer a global or universalistic account of existence.' Prof. Chethimattam gives his own description of death of modernity together with that of Lyotard:

The end of modernity was a loss of trust in the meta-narratives and a resistance to all kinds of foundationalism, which tried to establish a first principle to validate all objective knowledge. Jean Francois Lyotard stated: "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or emancipation (p.267).

A Shattering Experience: The new challenges especially posed by Postmodernism to the power of reason to understand and articulate the world of experience in any satisfactory way seems to bring in a turning point or even a shatter experience in Prof. Chethimattam's teaching career in Philosophy and Theology. But he easily gets over this impasse relying back on a strand of thought he had already manifested in his writings. A quote from the footnote in an article proves this claim: "In 'Mystical Experience, the Meeting point between East and West' presented at the Indian Philosophical Congress 1959, I argued that the intuitive realization of the Ultimate in one's interior, the common point of both Eastern and Western forms of mysticism is the ideal Indian epistemological model."¹⁶ We shall come back to this issue in our concluding observation.

Derrida and Postmodern Thought: The deconstruction proposed by Derrida seems to have done a great service to push postmodernist

15 Bryan S. Turner, 'Periodization and Politics in Postmodernism,' in *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*.

thought to the forefront and have given a kind of cautious acceptability to it. Prof. Chethimattam shows much understanding with what Derrida claimed. Derrida was relentlessly perusing the search for ultimate ground of understanding. This search for presuppositionless meaning was meant to go beyond all essence, dismantling all foundations. Prof. Chethimattam writes: "Greeks postulated the logos as a principle of unity. Rabbinical interpretation, on the other hand, tends towards diversity. 'The general is not an abstracted rule, but more of an extension of the particular, never losing its grounding in the particular; there is no fundamental opposition between them. These extensions and limitations are also never fixed, but fluid within the textual context'" (p.272). There was no centre. Only in a system of difference has the centre a meaning. That is why Derrida emphasized the word difference. The method he used for this purpose was deconstruction.

Main Objective: "The main objective of deconstruction was to dismantle conceptual oppositions like presence and absence, being and nothingness, and authentic and inauthentic by taking apart the hierarchical system of thought in order to reconstruct them in a different order" (p.273, 274). Thus the salutary aspect of postmodernism is said to be its stress on the particular. "We have to take note of the simultaneous presence of the two opposite forces operative in the changing patterns of human understanding, namely, the fundamentalist, homogenizing systems with instrumental rationalization, to use the expression of Habermas, and the diversifying, non-systematic, dialogical, more local, contextual and open currents."¹⁷ At this moment of the evolution of Prof. Chethimattam's thought it seems that he prefers diversifying force operative in us.

Katophatism and Apophatism: Prof. Chethimattam writes

Actually Derrida's deconstruction just raises the old controversy between *katophatism* and *apophatism* both derived from Plotinus. The leader of *katophatism* in the West was Augustine, who with his doctrine of the restless heart felt that the intellect

16 See Footnote 13, p.19.

17 *Western Encounter with Indian Philosophy*, 2002, p.328.

is a participation in the divine light and that spontaneously and naturally our mind moved to a love and understanding of the divine Good. Pseudo-Dionysius deriving his doctrine from Plotinus himself started the *apophatic* trend. He stated that we know about God more what he is not than what he is. Non-knowing was the core of the mysticism of Evagrius, Ponticus and a host of other Western mystics... So what is behind the deconstructionism of Derrida and other Jewish scholars (Buber, Levinas etc.) appear to be the assumptions of Hassidic mysticism (p.273).

An Apology for Mysticism

Logo/Cit – centric thought was always the backbone of Prof. Chethimattam. He has expressed himself in favour of and also challenging this position in the article of his final days, which we are now analyzing. In one place he writes: "Then there is truth with a big T, the vanishing point towards which our temporary truths converge, the final epistemic image unassailable by doubt, the absolutist truth towards which conditional truths converge. Since this goal of truth is an idealization, its function is regulative as opposed to the constitutive. Absolutist truth provides a kind of overarching *telos* that provides the promise of final intelligibility and ultimate meaning." But this position is challenged quoting William James saying that 'we have to live by the truth we can get' (p.270). But at the end of this discourse he almost repeats the above passage with a note of hope. "We are all moving to an ideal vanishing point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truth will some day converge. This truth with a big T provides an Omega point drawing towards it all human thinking and creative endeavours" (p.281). Having drifted between the unity and multiplicity of experience in philosophical and theological searches Pro. Chethimattam seems to have finally settled on the following proposition: "In a sense mysticism is not the end result of our endeavours, but the root of all philosophy and religion" (p.281) and so one will naturally have to fall back on silence in his highest wisdom.

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JB Chethimattam's Orientations in Theology: East and West and the Christian Vision

Thomas Kollamparampil

Dialogue between the East and the West, between the various theological and philosophical traditions, was one of the main concerns and projects of JBC. In many of his writings, JBC tried to highlight the values and riches of the Eastern and Indian traditions. Thomas Kollamparampil, a student of JBC and at present the President of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, discusses here the basic theological orientations of JBC and his emphasis on the Biblical and Eastern as well as Indian approaches. For JBC, theology itself is something that arises from the experience of man on his communitarian understanding of salvation. In the Graeco-Roman rational approach emphasis was on definition, order, organization and administration and the original Mystery was lost. We have to recover personal experience and the sense of absolute mystery.

Introduction

Dialogue and communion are vital dynamics for the survival of humanity on the globe. Such dynamics are all the more crucial in the post-modern globalized and globalizing world of human thinking and communication, production and distribution of goods, net-work of services and human development. Because of the accelerated haste in changes and speedy evolution of programmes, a proportionate speed is discernible in the breaking and reconstructions of customs and traditions. New customs and traditions should be speedily established and demolished according to their functionality, as situations change at a rapid speed. In all such instances the common denominator is the yearning, searching and hoping minds and hearts of humans on

the earth. According to J B Chethimattam Christian self-understanding looks at religion from the perspective of the common man, the poor, hungry, weeping and persecuted humanity. “It is not an abstract metaphysics, nor an elaborate legal system, but good news for the suffering and struggling human beings. Christianity looks for the crucified and risen Jesus in the present, in homes, streets, and factories, in the tears and hopes of women and men, in our own struggle for freedom and happiness, in our own history”(WC 25).¹

Basically the starting point of theology is from below. “Theology itself is something that arises from the experience of man on his communitarian understanding of salvation”(TTI 200). Theology is no more an ontology of God for man, but an anthropology of God for humanity as divinely designed and revealed progressively for the salvation of the whole creation. As Vatican II clearly affirms, men look to various religions for the answers to the mysteries of human condition that deeply stirs human heart (NA1). J B Chethimattam finds the views of J.N. Farquhar² valid on the fundamental unity of all religions, based on the sameness of the human heart and mind everywhere as well as ecumenism of William Ernest Hocking,³ seeing a certain smooth continuity between the world religions and Christianity. Hence J B Chethimattam writes: “Thus, Hocking made very clear what the Christian task in India is: to make this already-existing continuity between the Revelation in Christ and the Hindu experience clear and fully explicit”(PIT 145).

The inherent continuity and common content of humanity’s religious experiences should be seriously considered as constituent elements of any solid theology. Such an attempt definitely suggests

1 Abbreviations used in this article: *WC* = *We Christians*; *CR* = *Consciousness and Reality*, JB Chethimattam; *Dem* = *Demonstrations of Aphrahat*; *NA* = *Nostra Aetate*; *PIT* = *Patterns of Indian Thought*, JB Chethimattam; *TTI* = *Towards a Theology of Intercommunion*, JB Chethimattam.

2 Farquhar J.N., *The Crown of Hinduism*, 31-33; cf. J B Chethimattam, *Patterns of Indian Thought*, 144.

3 Hocking W.E., *The Coming of World Civilization*, 101-107; cf. J B Chethimattam, *Patterns of Indian Thought*, 145.

an approach from below, from the state of human condition and experiences. Thus J B Chethimattam's theological approach starts from below. Hence, he writes:

“... it is possible to start from below from our own natures, needs and aspirations and project God as the ultimate meaning and goal of our own existence. We can look into ourselves and see the image of God there, search our own history and find there signs and symbols of God's self-communication to humanity. So though an exact ontology of God for humans is not available, there is an anthropology of humans for God, centred in Christ, the Son of God incarnate among us. That is the meaning and scope of all theologizing” (TTI 10).

Based on these above mentioned basic observations, this paper on the theological contributions of J B Chethimattam is an attempt to present his philosophico-theological development from the Asian horizon. J B Chethimattam is firmly rooted in the classical Indian philosophical views, yet critically assessing them to find out bridges with the Christian world vision. He is equally rooted in the classical Western philosophical views, with his own clear assessment of western developments and the possible bridges with the Christian vision. J B Chethimattam presents his Christian theological vision as a possible middle road that gives, on the one hand, practical and concrete dimensions to the highly rationalized Western analytical and abstract views, and on the other hand, a very personal, subjective analysis of consciousness and the interiorizing dimensions of the mystical and absolutistic Eastern views. We deal with J B Chethimattam's treatment of the mysteries of Trinity, Christ and the Church in the Asian/Indian theological context. As reflections got maturing in J B Chethimattam's writings, we find his increased dependence on the biblical world views that provide high significations to concrete salvation historical developments and spiritual thrusts. Thus the biblical views are seen more meaningful, applicable and enlightening to the given existential situations of the individuals and the human society as a whole.

I. Indian Horizon and the views on Consciousness and Person

JBC by his analytical and comparative study of Indian philosophical systems of Sankara and Ramanuja, proposes a metaphysical basis

for Indian philosophical or theological pursuit. According to him while Sankara evaluates reality from the side of the Supreme Reality, ‘absolute consciousness’, Ramanuja looks at the Supreme Person from the side of the finite person. Thus Ramanuja has his feet on the ground. On all basic elements of metaphysics they agree and in many respects they converge. They differ mainly in their approach. Here I should refer to J B Chethimattam’s own rendering of the matter:

Both of them (Sankara and Ramanuja) agree that the starting point of inquiry into the nature of reality is consciousness. Only by analyzing our conscious experience and sounding its ultimate depths can a true evaluation of all reality be achieved.

Both of them agree that a mere theoretical and conceptual approach to reality is inadequate. What is needed is integral vision in which all the means of right knowledge are integrated and, in a way, transcended. In this, the *anubhava* of Sankara and the *dhyana* of Ramanuja are in agreement (CR 54).

From the Upanishadic trends three different views of approach to the reality can be seen. One looking at reality from the side of the Absolute and fails to account for the multiplicity of beings. The second one looking at reality from the side of multiplicity and fails to account for the unity. The third one trying to reconcile the absolute unity with the conditional multiplicity (CR 17). “This third trend of thought found in the Upanishads formed the Vedic background for the metaphysics of Ramanuja. He strove to save the value of the relative and finite world, human personality, and the usefulness of religion and personal devotion to the Supreme Lord, the personal God. In his choice of this Upanishadic trend, he was guided by the Dravidian tradition of which too he was the representative”(CR 18). The conditional multiplicity, mentioned above, might be seen in the light of the principles of evolution. They are the function of reflection manifested in thought that can be termed as *sattva*, the function of dynamism and creativity termed as *rajas*, and the function of limitation and individuality called *tamas*. They are three functional aspects of a single principle of evolution (CR 17). J B Chethimattam explains how Ramanuja’s position authentically represents the Indian tradition. So he states:

The system he (Ramanuja) constructed has behind it a plurality of views and trends, which do not break the unity of outlook in the approach to reality. A clear appreciation of this complex unity in plurality is very important in constructing a system of metaphysic against an Indian background (CR 33).

Ramanuja's metaphysical approach can address a wider range of requirements to accommodate the perception, reflection, and acceptance of the reality. According to Ramanuja, consciousness is the self-manifestation of Reality and is therefore the pattern for reality itself (CR 61). "It is through our consciousness reality presents itself, and in knowledge we are in the midst of the self-luminosity of the real and we understand it from within and not form without. The basis of this attitude of Ramanuja is his theory of knowledge itself, according to which there is no knowledge without the self-manifestation of reality" (CR 62). This self manifestation is through the consciousness.

1. Consciousness and Personality

Consciousness has subjective and objective poles. The bi-polar factors of consciousness can be very well seen in consciousness as a knower and knowledge. The knowing self *is* and *has* consciousness. Thus the self or the person/personality, is the most real factor and hence the Supreme Person is the supreme real. Personality is the ultimate, immutable and irreducible category of reality (CR 64). Consciousness is the dynamics of the personality. The basics of this consciousness issues as a sort of synthesis; that is between the knower and the knowledge, between substance and attributes, between body and soul, etc. According to all these interactive factors there is the channel of vertical relationship between the Supreme and the bottom, Infinite and the finite, etc. J B Chethimattam finds Ramanuja providing valuable contributions, based on analogy of being, to the metaphysics as integration rather than abstraction:

Consciousness presents an advantageous point of view to evaluate the whole field of reality. Here integration, not abstraction, is the right method. Sense experience, psychic phenomena and pure consciousness have to be integrated in a

synthesis to see the structure of the world of reality centred around *Brahman*, the supreme consciousness (CR 78).

Ramanuja looks at things not in their chronological emergence, but based on the interdependence. Here the effect of counterbalancing of the totality is the concern rather than constitutive finite elements in themselves. In this counterbalancing there is the sense and effect of complementarity and integral progression. The end of such a counterbalancing effects in the awareness that the end of knowledge is not an 'it' but 'I', the one who knows, and finally the 'THOU', the Supreme One who is the fullness of all. With this understanding the whole reality is seen on a subjective, personal level.

Emphasis on personality gives a new aspect to moral and spiritual values. These are not mere duty, law or practice, but pre-eminently the relation between two persons: the soul in following the laws of its conscious being obeys the Lord and does homage to Him, and surrenders itself totally to Him. He, for His part, in supreme love and compassion reveals Himself to it in intimate communion (CR 79).

Consciousness is neither a 'thing' nor a 'nothing'. It has its own consistency and internal intelligibility. It is neither totally action nor static. It is a fullness that flows out and manifests itself. It manifests an infinitesimal part of the self behind the manifested being (CR 88).

2. Personality from the View of Consciousness

Person is the highest ontological value, the most perfect aspect of the self-manifestation of being. There is a shift from the object on which reflection surrounds to the subject and his mode of reflection based on his consciousness and personality. The whole world of reality is composed of persons, subjects, their selves and consciousness. In other words there is a dialectical and dialogical relationship between the involved selves, the persons. Any act, as it is done as a person, implies freedom and responsibility of that person. The outcome of the act is also from the responsibility of the person. Hence, he deserves either praise or blame according as the act be good or bad (CR 186).

From the view of consciousness and persons, the whole reality is not out of isolated beings, but subsists in the web of inter-subjectivity.

This inter-subjectivity starts from the first human being. All human persons are thus a result of what is passed on to them, in a received state. Then the basic aspect is the fact of a trust received from an eternal and all-embracing Person. Hence, all factors, so to say, in me, set me in dialogue with other human beings and through them and in them with God Himself. Openness and relationship with others is the medium of being in the world. In that process 'love' is the radical medium and the expression of constructive openness. Thus love is symbolic. This love is oriented to commitment and communion for existence and fulfillment.

II. Triune God of Persons and the Humanity

When consciousness and person are found to be basic factors of reality, they cannot be static but dynamic in the form of being mutually open and interactive. This puts the whole discussion into the field of inter-subjectivity. So what one 'is' or 'has' is in proportion to the levels and grades of inter-subjectivity. This in other words means that our humanity, both collectively and individually, is already existing in a network of the inter-subjectivity of the whole humanity. The whole humanity, including the past, present and future, remains in a single net-work of inter-subjectivity. This inter-subjectivity is a received one from the eternal, all-embracing Person. Hence all growth and perfections in anyone is due to the inter-subjectivity and dialogue with others and basically through them to *the Other*, God himself. In the consciousness approach the inter-subjectivity with *the Supreme One*, the Lord, puts one to the experience of the Supreme as the fullness of reality and the source of perfection. In front of such a reality devotion and total self-surrender are the means to perfect self-realization (CR 192).

It is the experience of the Trinity by divine revelation that enhances human understanding and provides advancement in human thought for further understanding. This evolutionary progress can be seen in Judaism as well. Even in Judaism there are two lines of thought: one personal and anthropomorphic and the other abstract and impersonal. In Christ these two patterns of development find a synthesis and fulfillment. God is absolute and ineffable. But at the same time this ineffable one has revealed himself in the Son of God, Messiah. Holy

Spirit completes this internal dynamism of the Godhead. "This movement starts as a self reflection of the Father in the Word and culminates as the divine self-gift in the subsistent love of the Holy Spirit" (CR 194).

In the Indian tradition also two parallel currents of thought exist, one anthropomorphic and devotional and the other abstract and absolutist. These two lines meet in the Indian interioristic way. This interioristic experience of the *Ultimate Self* is designated as *saccidananda* (*sat-cit-ananda*), a modified form of the *satyam-jnanam-anandam* of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. For Sankara and Ramanuja these terms do not constitute any definition of Brahman. They indicate three positive modes of the *One* who is existent, conscious and blissful. "Hence, the experience of God as *saccidananda* implicitly contains an experience of the Trinity of God" (CR 197).

According to J B Chethimattam the Western reflection, in a general way, follows the mode of rational analysis where the knowing subject and the known reality have their subsistence in the *Subsistent Subject*. The total fecundity of the Father is made expressed in the Word and their mutual dynamism is breathed out as the Spirit. In *saccidananda* some irreducible dimensions of the divinity are identified through human experience. J B Chethimattam substantiates: "In both approaches, the divine personality is best understood in the depth of our own finite personality, which, as a reflection of the selfhood, in loving desire seeks to realize itself more and more fully, crying *Abba* to the ultimate *Aham*" (CR 201).

III. Person of Christ as the Existential Foundation of Humanity

By treating the mystery of Christ J B Chethimattam starts his theology from below. He underlines the fact of historical Jesus who practically divided history into before and after of his presence in history. The One beyond history and humanity entered into history and humanity and reconstituted the new humanity. A reconciliation and integration took place in Christ, the new head and the vivifying centre of humanity. Humans have to relate themselves to this new

head. The teachings of Jesus was not in abstract terms, but in concrete life situations and life bound categories of everyday life and behaviour, in words and deeds, that were mutually substantiating the underlying message. All such teachings were in a community. "He gathered around him a community of disciples, who were witnesses to his personality, teaching, suffering, death and resurrection. This living historical experience of what is designated as 'the Christ-event' is the beginning of Christianity. This community of disciples communicated their experience to others, and so the original small gathering soon expanded into the Church" (CR 129).

Understanding the person of Christ was the real challenge for Christians. The biblical thrust and the Jewish-Christian concerns were to understand salvation as the work of God in fulfillment of His promises to Israel. But the Graeco-Roman thrust was to show the connaturality of the Son and Saviour to the invisible and incomprehensible God. At the same time the direct human experience found Jesus as any human being. Then the challenge was to understand and explain the mystery of the God-man. The Arian heresy and the Greek reaction to Arianism for the victory of orthodoxy have highly disturbed the Christian vision of salvation. Hence, J B Chethimattam writes:

The Nicene definition of *homoousios* was the culmination of the Greek reaction to the Arian heresy. But what was lost sight in this dogmatic victory of orthodoxy was the vital link with the Judaic cradle in which Christianity was nurtured, against the background of which alone the specifically Christian concept of salvation can properly be understood (TTI 111).

The drama of salvation is not something that happened in the divinity, but the very thing that happened in the whole humanity, inaugurated in the Jesus of history. So the human development and consciousness of Jesus are important. Jesus moved according to the religious and cultural settings of his times. He approached John the Baptist for baptism and fulfilled all legal requirements. But the Graeco-Roman thought pattern stressed the divinity and defended it. In such attempts there arose the heresies of Docetism, Apollinarianism, Monophysitism, Diophysitism, etc. What was lost sight was the

fulfillment of the OT prophesies in the person of Christ and the true purification and sanctification of humanity through Christ. The later Christological and Trinitarian controversies show the subjugation of mysteries to the Philosophical tools. J B Chethimattam's stress on beginning from below insists on the wonder in the humanity of Christ. So he states:

The divine self disclosure both in creation and in the Incarnation imply change not in the Divinity, but in what is effected in the finite world and in the humanity of the Word Incarnate. ... Thus the humanity of Jesus receives a double stamp, one of grace as the impression of the self-giving and indwelling Spirit, and the resulting stamp of the unique sonship of the one Son. The Spirit and the Word are as two hands of God revealed by the humanity of Jesus (TTI 127).

Aphrahat, in the legacy of the Syriac tradition, finds the identity of Christ who is heading the humanity as the New Adam (*Dem IX,1*). This is theology from below. Aphrahat finds Christ as the Architect and a valiant Athlete (*Dem VIII,1*). It is in total surrender to him one is rebuilt and becomes successful. Aphrahat explains the role of the Son: "We rejoice in you beloved Son who built the way for our healing. We thank you the Physician of our suffering, who has sent the Spirit as the medicine for our sickness" (*Dem XXIII, 52; TTI 129*). The theological content of the role of "New Adam" signifies and establishes the Son's intimate relationship to humanity and consequently to the Trinity. It is from the personal relationship communion, community and commitment develop. Each relationship brings with it its own responsibilities. There arise new mutualities and relationships. Resurrection brings the highest theological symbolism of the humanity of Jesus. Resurrection of Jesus was not the mere repair of the damage, but it is far beyond as it is the actual attainment of the full potential of the 'first Adam' through the 'Second Adam' (TTI 138/9). Christ is the new head of the humanity and he communicates his Spirit to the whole of humanity (TTI 138/9). Only in relationship to this new head of humanity salvation is possible. So he is the existential foundation and eschatological hope of humanity.

IV. The Church and Communion

Theology, as described by J B Chethimattam, is something that arises from the experience of man on his communitarian understanding of salvation. "The whole message of divine revelation is the story of the creation of humans in the image and likeness of God, their call to attain fulfillment of their vocation in the fellowship with the Father and the Spirit by the creative Divine Word who entered human history in the Incarnation" (TTI 200/1).

In the rationalistic philosophies and theologies of both East and West anthropocentrism and theocentrism may be found going on opposite directions. But in the actual development of Christian salvation history, they are found linked up in a deep and organic way. It is because there is a deep divine-human relationship developed and flourished in the history of salvation. So J B Chethimattam writes in his latest theological treatise:

Fides et Ratio makes clear the basic postulates of philosophical theology. Wojtyla's starting point is the self-awareness of the self-determining agent. He made radical departure from Blondel and the Transcendental Thomists of not beginning inside the world of consciousness as the human spirit. In this perspective the world has meaning only as created by God and as redeemed by the Son. The Incarnate Word not only repaired the damage done by the sin, but also restored man's original orientation to fellowship with the Trinity (TTI 207).

Western theologizing is prone to stress a wide gap between the world and God. Hence, the theological effort is to bridge the gap. In bridging this gap Judeo-Christian vision and the acceptance of covenant relationship functions as a tangible model and means. There emerges personal relationship in a covenant. Incorporation into the covenant and communion are steps to be followed. In the Graeco-Roman thrust for definition, order, organization and administration, the original Mystery and Ministry of the Church became eventually Sacrament and power exercised in a mode of hierarchical set up with much political and social categories than the inspiring power of the Spirit.

In J B Chethimattam's view, in the perspective of the universal salvific will of God, the whole religious history and experiences of humanity have to be taken as a single unit and common heritage. The so called exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism are western creations. No single Church has the full formulation and possession of the mystery of salvation presented by Christ. It is the duty of the Churches together in achieving the fullness of the Gospel (TTI 225). Church does not save, but only provides the means and shows the way to submit to the Spirit who effects the sanctification offered by Christ, the new Adam. A community under the guidance of the Spirit yearning for union with Christ, the new Adam who creates a new humanity, is the fruit of Resurrection. Therefore, the basic factor of the Church is not an external organization, but internal unity and harmony among believers. The unique character of the Church is that it is constituted by the Spirit of the Risen Christ, the Head (TTI 233).

The world of post-modernity has pulled down all world-controlling visions such as those of Descartes, Kant, Hegel and even Marx. J B Chethimattam explains:

Against modernity's dogmatism and the tendency to build neat systems, thinkers like Soren Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky tried to restore life to its original difficulty. This marked a new era of Christian faith away from the fights about orthodoxy and heresy occasioned by the Protestant Reformation. They want to help Western Christianity to get away from the Greek mould in which it was stuck for centuries. For example Kierkegaard showed that repetition was not simply going back to the same old idea of the Greeks, for whom eternity was in the back and every repetition was a recollection. Instead any repetition is a new adventure, a new discovery (TTI 188).

In the new situations, Christian theologians have the duty of combining the conceptual expressions of the earlier findings with the hermeneutical significances of the new experiences with regard to the Christian message today. As J B Chethimattam explains, basic to the current outlook is the difference between *bonded sets* and *centred sets*. Traditional Christian theology influenced by Aristotelian logic tends to think in terms of bonded sets. It judges 'Christianness' from

a set of principles and dogmas and share a minimum share of such elements. In such a set there is no thought about the quality of the 'Christianness'. The contemporary people deal with centred sets. Things are grouped according to the direction in which they are moving. In that onward moving there are different stages of achievements and realizations. This factor is true with regard to Eastern religions, especially, Hinduism and Buddhism. Post-modern man does not start with a set baggage of ideas, but learns from the experiences and by one's choice. In this way a Christian is one who is headed towards Christ and on his path there are several stages. So J B Chethimattam concludes:

In the context of centred sets 'conversion' is a turning around and heading towards the new center. Hence, the theology of communion has great importance in slowly moving towards God, towards Christ and towards one's brothers and sisters in the community of the Church. Growth is central to the centred sets (TTI 193).

While Western theology has an analytical understanding of theology based on inner relationships, the Oriental approach is based on the mystical union. So J B Chethimattam writes:

The central insight here is that any transformation in man through Christ has its root in the communion of the three divine persons. Though it does not imply any division in God, the change in man points to its basis in the communion of the Persons. Mystical transformation is the spiritual appropriation of the divine economy including incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection which are objective facts from the side of man, a living spiritual reality to be internalized and consciously appropriated in each Christian (TTI 195).

Oriental mystical approach finds Adam as not having fallen from perfection, but from the potential to be transformed into perfection. The deviations have to be rectified and the path to the potential perfection has to be cleared. Redemption is not any juridical satisfaction to the offences committed as in the Latin mode of perceiving things.

J B Chethimattam finds more reliable biblical patterns in the East Syrian theology. “This theology developed in the early Church that existed outside the confines of the Roman empire provides a vision of the Church unaffected by Greek thinking” (TTI 236). The East Syrian theology of Persian Christianity differs much from the idealistic thought of the Hellenistic Christians and the impersonal thinking of Hindus and Buddhists of the East (TTI 238). Based on the OT covenantal perception of relationship with Yahweh, the Church is a mystery and a communion for the Syrians. Christian faith is a covenantal relationship which determines the constitution and relationship in that covenant. “The covenant assumes a structural position of molding all its theology, ethics and organization. Mystery (*raza*), economy (*m'dabranutha*), and participation or communion (*sautaputha*) form the three moments of this ecclesial conception (TTI 239).

The central perspective in this East Syrian theology is that the Old Testament and the New Covenant established in Jesus form a single history of human salvation, a continuous plan uninterrupted by the failure of Adam. So the scope of the Incarnation is not just restoring man back to Paradise but to continue the original plan of the Father (TTI 240).

Salvation for Ephrem is the communion with the Word of God, diachronically through the historical events and synchronically embracing the whole humanity and the creation. For Ephrem, “there is no opposition between nature and grace. He speaks of the three harps of God, the Old and New Testaments and Nature. The basis of Ephrem’s symbolic theology is the presence of God in Scripture and in Nature” (TTI 244).

For the East Syrians, “human salvation was essentially what was accomplished in the second Adam, the true humanity of Jesus ... the Son God. For them Greek philosophy was not an adequate tool of theology. The only valid theology was centred in the Word of Scripture and in the celebration of the divine liturgy” (TTI 253). J B Chethimattam finds this profound dependence of the East Syrians on the Scripture and Nature (historical factors of humanity) instead of any philosophical system as a great enlightenment and healthy path in Christian theological reflection.

V. Indian Horizon and the Eastern / Asian Christian Theology

Christianity and Christian theology are globalized. There is no single approach in Christian theology that is absolute and comprehensive. Systems and analytical tools emerge and reemerge from time to time as history progresses. In the Asian Christian situation we find a host of influences. In such situations crises and solutions are inevitable. Proper crisis management and discerning solutions are the needs of the hour.

Dealing with the Asian and Indian scenes of theologizing J B Chethimattam brings out certain evaluations. According to him the fundamental problem and crisis in theological approaches emerge from the human mind, following the rational, analytical pattern of the Western thought, that projects its own model of thought and trying to enclose in it the ineffable divine self-communication. In the similar manner the Eastern philosophical approach of Hinduism and Buddhism explaining the divine through human conceptions of consciousness and emptiness are also trying to capture the ineffable (TTI 162). Both of them, the objectifying Western approach and the interioristic Eastern/Asian approach, are unable to enlighten the historical vicissitudes of actual human life and history. Hence, a search for enlightenment away from both the Western and the Eastern is the sequel. In such a crisis J B Chethimattam finds a way out:

Sandwiched between the Western and the Eastern modes of interpretation, the Christian message itself found a natural opening in the actual development of a middle position between West and East that emerged from the situation of an ancient Christian community situated outside the Roman Empire (TTI 14). The great merit of the East Syrian theological tradition is that it does not introduce any set philosophical system to interpret the experience of divine revelation. Though it is aware of the metaphysical systems of both Greek world and of the East it does not support its faith on those man-made systems. Instead it takes a self-disclosure of God as presented in the Bible in all its simplicity. It is a theology from below seeking

answers to the deepest concerns of everyday human experiences from the depth of human life itself, from the Spirit of God dwelling in the heart of every human being (TTI 63).

Biblical history of salvation is the medium and the mode of instruction. Instead of appealing to any philosophy, this theological approach bases itself on the covenantal experience in history. Christian faith is a new covenant. This covenant is a personal event and it directs one's moral and spiritual growth. Here, together with struggling against sin and satan, there is the positive task of working with Christ for the salvation of the world through the physical-natural conditions of the present world (TTI 44/5). Aphrahat and Ephrem are the exponents of this mode of theological view. Since this approach is personal, it is important that one examines oneself to see whether he is working with the Lord or the Lord is leading him. Looking into everyday history is important here. Scripture and history are important elements.

The starting point is the biblical fact of creation of humanity in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26). Messiah is the highest level of that image. The growth of that image to its full stature through the Messiah and Saviour is the goal of Christian life. Creation and salvation are seen in a single historical perspective. Everything that happens in history is accounted as building up or falling down. So J B Chethimattam summarizes the matter, "It is the way scripture describe it. They are not theologies but stories of how God works, rests, is satisfied, displeased, gets angry, all as perceived from the side of man and his world. It is basically anthropology of how the image of God is developed from the lowest levels of creation to its maximum heights" (TTI 52).

As Ephrem insists, while we take the literal meaning of the scriptural texts avoiding allegorism, it is to be noted that each word of God is addressed to us today. Those words also address us within us. We are to personally respond to that as well.

The New Covenant is not any substitute for the Old. Both constitute a single original plan of God, which was not thwarted by human sin. According to Ephrem the aim and scope of the

Incarnation is not simply to repair the damage caused by human sin, but rather to follow up the original plan of God. So the ultimate aim was not just to restore Adam's humanity to Paradise, but to raise humanity to the position of honour that Adam and Eve would have been granted had they kept the divine commandment (*TTI* 54).

Here what is spoken is not any model for theologizing, but actual history of human behaviour then in the history of salvation and now in our present context. It is rather starting from the actual situation of life. Here as it is so sharply related to the life situation each one has to make a decision, a personal response has to be evolved. This means in J B Chethimattam's words, "one has to grow from the personal religion of one's parents" (*TTI* 61). Whatever is given to each one is the starting point and definitely only upon that one can make an organic development as willed by God.

Conclusion

J B Chethimattam had the search for a synthesis of the philosophical and theological views of the East and the West. His path was through integration rather than abstraction. He himself was aware of the two possible dangers on such a path of integration, such as, anthropomorphism and absolutism. On the path of integration J B Chethimattam highlights the role and reality of inter-subjectivity. This is all the more made clear from the Western rational analysis point of view and that of the Eastern consciousness experience approach as well. This reality of inter-subjectivity has been seen as made manifest and concrete in the Christian history of salvation. In the Christian experience of the history of salvation the distance between the Infinite and the finite, between the Absolute and the concrete are reduced to the level of human tangibility. So through the history of salvation, creation, incarnation and redemption, the inter-subjectivity between God and humanity and that between human persons are made clear and set as a call to salvific integration to divine realities and the human historical conditions of any age. Thus the biblical mode of historically conditioned and concretized vision is seen as the best way of human realization. The biblical way transcends all man-made systems and

paths. J B Chethimattam finds the Syrian mode of finding out the fruits of the self-disclosure of God and the human response to the same in the biblical history as enlightenment for the contemporary history of any period. The biblical historical mode enlightens all forms of divine and human inter-subjectivity. It is capable of providing salvation through the physical, historical and natural conditions of the present world. Thus it is a theology from below accessible to all those who seek.

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Towards Making an Indian Christian Theology

The vision of Fr. Chethimattam

V. F. Vineeth

Indian Christian theology was the main concern of JBC. V. F. Vineeth, a long-time colleague of JBC analyses the writings of JBC and outlines his concept of Indian Christian theology. Indian theology should not be an abstract, academic and comparative study of Indian religions and Christianity. On the contrary, it should take seriously the life of Indian people and their concrete situation of religious pluralism and massive poverty and lead the Indian people to integral liberation in Christ. JBC moves away from a rationalistic approach to theology to a mystical approach , where personal experience plays the key role. Fr. Vineeth is the founder-Director of Vidyavanam Ashram, Bangalore.

Fr. Chethimattam was a great genius, a fast writer, an original thinker and professor. In this paper, I am trying to outline the salient points from his writings regarding the creation of an Indian Christian Theology.

What Indian Christian Theology is Not

In an article written in 1978, under the title “Problems of an Indian Christian Theology – a Critique of Indian Theologizing”¹, Chethimattam presents a few critical remarks on Indian theologizing. He speaks on the Chaldean beginnings, the Latin missions, colonial

1 Amaladoss and Co. (ed.) *Theologizing in India, Seminar Papers*, (Pune, Oct. 26-30, 1978), Theological Publications in India, Bangalore

politics and the craze for westernization after Indian national independence etc. Then he makes a brief survey of what has been done in the field of Indian Christian Theology and divides them as follows: 1. The stage of confrontation with a sense of superiority complex, 2. Christ the revelation with a fullness theory, 3. Christ the Super Name which was prepared before the Son, 4. Theology of eschatological convergence with an emphasis on liberation theology. Afterwards he gives us the following norm for an Indian Christian Theology. 1. It should not be a mere intellectual curiosity of the academics, 2. It should not be study of comparative religion, 3. It should not be an attempt to find out common denominator between Christianity and Hinduism or of any other religion. It should be an "evaluation of the historical situation" reflectively expressing "God's eschatological salvific plan and the meaning of Christ in the context of religious pluralism" (p. 204). It should endeavor "to provide the common man with a sense of moral and religious values and of meaning in his own life, ...to discern the positive factors that will build up the mass of humanity, cut up by particular religious traditions." Finally it should exercise a great deal of self-criticism to re-examine the common place categories they have long taken for granted like divinity, humanity, salvation, supernatural, truth, revelation and incarnation to liberate their meaning from the socio-cultural, philosophical and historical context in which they have been deified, and make their theological insights re-incarnate in the life and concerns of the people. Only in this way can the church become fully incarnate in India. But in this article he does not attempt to work out any of these suggested themes. A better plan of an Indian Christian Theology is given in an article written seven years earlier, in 1971 under the title "The Spirit and Orientation of an Indian Theology."² Though this is not an elaborate treatise on Indian Christian Theology, this gives valid insights into the making of such a theology.

What Indian Christian Theology should be

1. According to Fr. Chethimattam, it should be uncompromisingly Christ-centered: Christ and his mission for a new humanity, universal love and service for all is the corner stone on which this theology must be built.

2. The Indianness of this theology is to be determined from the approaches it makes to understand and interpret Christ for us in India, and for all the people in the world. In this article Fr. Chethimattam draws several profound insights from the Indian Philosophy, mythology and as well as its cultural backgrounds.

3. This theology should differentiate itself from both traditions Indian and Western which are popular today.

4. This is because the western approach dominated by reason, as faith questioning reason: *fides quaerens intellectum* (p. 452), is not the appropriate method of theology for India. On the other hand, the Indian tradition of mythical time and dubious nature of the validity of concrete reality is not acceptable in the Christian way of understanding salvation.

5. "Theology is grounded in experience. This experience is openness in faith to the activity of the Spirit in one's own interior" (p. 454). In this context Fr. Chethimattam says, theology is not *fides quaerens intellectum*, but, as it sounds to me as *intellectus admirans fidem* (intellect admiring faith). The real theology takes place in the level of faith, experiencing God in the inner most layers of consciousness, and not in the level of reason, which brings down faith to rational argumentation.

6. It means that, he is moving from a rationalist theology to a mystical theology, as a more valid theology at least for India. I would gladly subscribe to this position, but I am not quiet certain whether this is what Chethimattam really means, because elsewhere I find him inclined to say that theology is an activity of the mind or intellect. The need of silencing the mind and journey through dark night of the soul is not elaborately dealt with. But there is a good indication to that: "Theology is not, at least in the spirit of the Indian quest, a progression from the obscurity of faith to the intelligibility of the logos, but a movement from the twilight of faith to the blinding brightness of

an inner vision" (p. 452). Therefore, it is not the duty of theology "to provide clear and distinct answers to every problem but only points the way towards the comprehensive view in which all particular problems loose their relevance" (*ibid*).

The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason) of Late Pope John Paul II would gladly accept this position, because after elaborately dealing with the problem of *fides querens intellectum*, Pope asks the Western philosophers and theologians, their duty is to lead the intellect to the door of faith.³ So it is not the little light of reason that matters but the blinding luster of divine revelation that makes theology possible.

7. Theology is not to be curtailed into a structure of systems, but rather should be considered a journey through *tapas*, inner awakening. Holy Spirit is *tapas* (p. 454) and theology begins with the awakening of the Spirit in the heart of the believing Christians. "Where not our hearts burning when he was explaining Scriptures to us" (Lk. 24:32).

8. If later Indian philosophers have made it more rationally sterile, especially after Buddhism *sunyavada* and *vijanavada*, this need not be taken as a pattern for our theologizing. The original Indian experience is more authentic, mixing the mythical and the mystical, the visual and invisible. This may be the reason why we find numerous references in Chethimattam's writings to the mythical stories of the Vedic literature. Myths are important because it does not take away from the concreteness of reality, presents us the divine with 'flesh and blood' that we can see, feel and also reflect. But it is not yet clear to me how much Chethimattam wants us to draw from the mythical stories he is referring to because concerned with the Christ's historicity and importance of historical existence for Christian redemptive experience, what value he ultimately gives for the periodic epiphanies of God, be it of *avadaras* or of any other god or goddess in Indian tradition, is not very clear.

3 *Fides et Ratio*, para no.

9. I appreciate the reality of beginning theology from one's own personal experience of reality which is consciousness by nature. He praises Indian search for its beginning from the fact of consciousness, whereas the Greek thinking, according to him, begins from the outer dimensions of reality, namely the world and the cosmos. Reality is consciousness and every human being is called to participate in this consciousness. In this way real theology begins with an experience of God in one's own depth rather than experiencing the world outside and rising up to the God of the universe. E.g. From movement to the immovable mover.

10. In one instance he makes his own version of Trinitarian mystery in an Indian paradigm. He says, "The Trinitarian mystery is the ground and starting point of an Indian theology. The internal experience of the Spirit acting in us as the *aham* (our real 'I'), and the encounter with the world as the *Tvam* (Thou, the true Word) become unified in the Supreme Reality of the Father, the real *Tat*: in this unified vision one is not primarily concerned with the historical Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, who appeared in a particular point of the Globe. What is important is his being the summary and sum total of the external expression of the individual divinity, a climatic point for the exteriorization of interior experience" (p. 456). He does not develop this Trinitarian theology further, at least in this article.

The Theology of Incarnation

11. Naturally, as a Christian believer, Chethimattam does not accept numerous *avadaras*. The uniqueness of Jesus is very clear. But this does not rule out God's salvific work through other intermediaries. Thus upholding the uniqueness of Christ, he also holds the role other religions and their intermediaries may play or might have played in the course of time in bringing salvation to mankind. Thus in the above mentioned article he also says that "For this Krishna or Buddha may play the role of Christ. History and precision will be called for only when attention is directed to the structure of external experience located in time and space" (p.456).

12. In his article '*Atman* and *Vishnu*' he says:

Experience of the Spirit dwelling and working in the hearts of men and of the Risen Lord in whom all humanity conquered

death and sin are the two essential points of the Christian experience. Similarly Buddhism finds in *Dharma* the ultimate meaning of reality and in Buddha the final realization of all authentic humanity. For Islam the rule of Allah in men's lives and the unique prophet of God Mohammad are two points on which there can be no compromise. In Hinduism too the experience of the Atman is that of the divine principle guiding men from within their hearts as the *Antaryamin*, the Inner Controller, while Vishnu-Krishna presents the ideal of the unique and the definitive self-disclosure of God in the fullness of humanity. Within this basic common framework of religious experience each of these religions has its own specific mode of approach to present: Christians emphasis God as the Creator and Father, Islam the Supreme law giver and Judge, Buddhism the ineffable and inconceivable condition of all reality and the Hindus the ground of being and the self of man's own self (p. 152).⁴

13. The great corrective, he proposes is with the regard to the concept of time. He says that "Time and history constitute the highest point and weakest link in Indian theological thought. Even from earliest *kala* (times) is the radical meaning of the finite world. Time is a kind of projection of eternity and itself has no reality. Its whole reality is that of being a reflection, a projection and extrapolation of the eternal. In this sense every creature, every particular being and every particular event find a divine meaning and purpose. It is not a project or a plan to accomplish a finite objective" (p. 456-457). Though this sounds wonderful, in the next paragraph he says, "On the other hand, the central defect of the Indian concept of time is that it is purely mythological and has no real place in concrete actuality. Time is only an idea, a model. It is not even a plan to aim at certain fulfillment. This is weakest element in the Indian religious thought. It does not pay sufficient attention to the man in concrete space-time

4 Thomas Aykara, (ed.) *Meeting of Religions*, Dharmaram Publications, 1978, p. 152.

situation. And the whole field of concrete existence has certain inner unity" (457).

14. This distinction is important from the point of view of Christian theology because one believe that Jesus entered into the real history of the world and suffered, died with a body and a soul, which is just like ours, except for sin. Time and history should be taken seriously. Chethimattom is very clear about the historicity of Christ, his suffering and death and above all the new humanity he has inaugurated on earth. "Thus Jesus of Nazareth coming in the fullness of time, born of a woman, at a definite place, is the summary and full meaning of human history because he is Christ, the Son of God who is able to bring concrete time into contact with eternity. Hence, the Christian experience completes the Indian concept of time. The Indian tradition looks on time as the shadow of eternity. Christian view brings the eternal into concrete time and gives history its direction and purpose. Christology is essentially the incarnation of the Word in the concrete situation of time.⁵

15. I fully agree with this quote, though it leads a lot of questions unanswered. What is the nature of the reality of time and all temporal things? Are they lasting forever? For the Hindu view, what is everlasting real is only really real. From this perspective they look at time. This does not mean that what is done in time has no meaning or value. The very *karma* theory, which we are not accepting as such, does say that what is done here, is not deleted completely. It does increase our merit or demerit. This is what Sankara ultimately says that what is done in time has practical value, *vyavaharika-satya*, though not eternal value in time. But it does bring liberation which is beyond time. Hence the final question is whether Hindus own the criticisms we are raising against their concept of time. For them the entire Christianity is only a matter of 2000 years in the world of *kalpas* (ages) of millions and millions of years of humanity on earth. Chethimattom's answer to these questions could be:

Hindus, on the other hand, view the phenomenon of incarnation from the side of God. In this perspective the humanity assumed by the divine person is more a shadow than reality; it has no reality on the level of God. Hence Hinduism fails to grasp fully the human meaning of incarnation, and to understand that once the divine has entered the human history, human history itself definitively transformed once and for all, and hence there cannot be more than one incarnation. It, therefore, reduces the incarnation to a set of theophany, repeated age after age (p.154).⁶

16. There are some other points Chethimattam touches upon, which are valuable for the making of an Indian Christian Theology. But these are done as he treats other subjects such as, Inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, liberation theology, the theology of the Church or the kingdom of God etc. I am not entering to these specific areas, because we have different papers for that in this symposium.

I am happy to conclude my paper with an appealing quote from Chethimattam:

Proceeding as he does from a vision of the absolute the Indian sees the inadequacy of every particular system. Hence the Christian theologian must recognize the need for a theological pluralism in the approach to faith and provide for it. But this is an arduous task that needs the co-operation and concerted effort of all theologians in India.⁷

6 *Atman and Vishnu*, p. 154.

7 *Theologizing in India*, op.cit., p. 206

Christological Perspectives of John Chethimattam

Joseph Pathrapankal

Christology has been the bone of contention all through the history of Christianity. Who Jesus Christ is? Is he God and Man at the same time? Why did the Word take human flesh or body? Is Jesus the Saviour of Christians only, or of the entire humankind? What is the relation between Jesus and other Saviour figures or other religions? Ever since the beginning of Christianity, these and similar questions were hotly discussed and debated in theology. What are the new imperatives of a contextualized Christology which critically takes into account the data of the New Testament and, at the same time, try to understand the Christological issue serenely and dispassionately? Joseph Pathrapankal, the Professor Emeritus of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram and the well-known Indian Bible scholar examines in this article the Christological perspectives of John Chethimattam. The focus of Christological studies in India during the past twenty five years and more has been in the area of contextualization with sufficient attention paid both to the inherited Christology of the past and to the need of realistically understanding Christology within the context of India's religious pluralism and socio-economic complexity. Chethimattam tried to articulate a Christology that is biblically sound, spiritually satisfying, theologically credible and pastorally helpful in a religiously pluralistic world.

Ever since Jesus of Nazareth asked his immediate disciples about how people took him for, and the disciples responded to this question with a variety of opinions held by the people, it has been customary to raise a series of questions about the real identity and significance of Jesus of Nazareth down through the centuries. In fact, each Christian is a beneficiary of multiple understandings and beliefs

concerning him, and it is necessary because of the multiple dimensions of life as it is to be unfolded in the world through one's allegiance to him. But the issue of what is known as Christology seems to have become more crucial and radical in our times with new approaches that seem to challenge many of the traditional positions which were held in earlier times. Already in the New Testament we see the beginnings of some distorted attempts made by certain Christian believers, who tried to establish the identity of the person of Jesus Christ in their own way, such as the early Gnostics who saw the person of Christ in the category of superhuman revealers, who had enabled his disciples to attain salvation through an otherworldly knowledge (*gnosis*) of salvation he had imparted to them. The Johannine writings reveal certain Christological ambiguities current in some Johannine circles, which tried to deny the true humanity of Jesus through its 'Docetic' tendencies. 1 John 4:2-3 refer to those who denied the true humanity of Christ as antichrists, who were trying to destroy the original faith of the community which Jesus of Nazareth has formed. In fact, the prophecy of Simeon about Jesus as one who was destined for the rise and fall of many and as a sign that will be opposed (Lk 2: 34) began to show its repercussions already during the early years of the Christian movement. Going through the history of the many heresies in the Church during the early centuries, we once again see that Christology was the point of departure for most of these heresies. Many such heresies evolved, which were centered on the person and work of Christ in relation to the specific role he played in history. At the same time, the history of the development of the Christological dogmas also shows that, in spite of bitter confrontations between several groups, at last there was some kind of recognition of legitimate differences in the formulation of their thoughts.

Christology passed through two important stages during the first century, namely, the four Gospels and the first disciples of Jesus. Later on, it was unfolded in classical forms with their emphasis on the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. The movement of the Church into the Hellenic culture from the second century C.E. onwards clearly marks the Church's entrance into a new stage of doing Christology.

The Hellenic way of thinking tended to focus upon the trans-historical, the abstract and universal, as the criterion of truth. In a manner similar to the efforts of the four Gospel communities, the churches of the second to the fifth centuries and beyond realized that they were in need of interpreting anew their experience of God who was alive for them in and through Jesus Christ. Hence the resultant classical Christology is Christology in a new and different key, which was focused on the question of the divinity and humanity of Christ. The Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon tried to formulate a Christology along these lines.¹

Whereas the Fathers of the Church looked to philosophy to explain who Christ was, and were more concerned about defining his ontological composition rather than his historical action, contemporary theologians are more committed to contextualizing Christology in the socio-cultural as well as religious situations of their times. Hence the focus of Christological questions in our times seems to have undergone some radical changes. It could be formulated as follows: What should be the controlling factor in Christological discussions in our times? Is it the testimony of the New Testament? Or is it the Patristic tradition which climaxed in the teachings of the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon? What is the role of the theological contributions of later theologians during the long history of the Church, during which the reality of religious pluralism was an unknown and unrecognized factor in theological reflection, especially because of the colonial theology sponsored by the Christian West? What are the new imperatives of a contextualized Christology which critically takes into account the data of the New Testament and, at the same time, try to understand the Christological issue serenely and dispassionately? It seems that the focus of Christological studies in India during the past twenty five years and more has been in the area of such a contextualization with sufficient attention paid both to the inherited Christology of the past and to the need of realistically understanding Christology within the

1 Gerard H. Luttenberger, *An Introduction to Christology in the Gospels and early Church*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, 1998, pp. 262-265.

context of India's religious pluralism and socio-economic complexity.² Here it is a call for enlightened theologians who can see and judge things from a wider perspective.

Deutero-Isaiah exhorted the post-exilic community of Judea, as it was trying to become myopic and introvert after the bitter experiences of the Babylonian captivity: "Widen the space of your tent, extend the curtains of your home. Do not hold back! Lengthen your ropes, make your tent-pegs firm, for you will burst out to right and to left" (Deut 54:2-3). As I pay homage to John Chethimattam, one of our leading and pioneer theologians, it is these encouraging words of Deutero-Isaiah that come to mind, recalling the fact that John Chethimattam was someone who always tried to widen the space of his tent and extend the curtains of his home in theological reflection. I have purposely changed the original title given to me, "Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ" to "Christological Perspectives of John Chethimattam" because, to my mind, Christology is not all about uniqueness and universality. There is something more than uniqueness and universality for Christ. Theologians in our times are exhorted to go out of their centripetal world of theological reflection to the wider world of God and see and judge issues with a commitment to relevance and meaning. In general, theologians have a tendency to buy, sell, stock and price the intangible goods of theological market and it seems that Christology during the past several decades had become such a commodity. It is precisely here that we have to start anew thinking, reflecting and discussing the concrete issues of Christology as a theological as well as a pastoral issue.

The Christological reflections of Chethimattam are at the same time realistic and down-to-earth. The very title of his thinking about Christ is "The human face of Jesus – Jesus and the Kingdom" in his

2 "For a relevant Christology in the Indian context an adequate response to the complex religious and social situation is imperative. The emerging trends in Indian Christology take these two complex dimensions of the Indian reality seriously", Jacob Parappally, *Emerging Trends in Indian Christology*, IIS Publications, Bangalore, 1995, p. xiii.

book “Towards a Theology of Intercommunion” published in 2001. For Chethimattam, salvation is a human phenomenon, restoration of the human race to the status of friendship with God. Though God alone could take the initiative for this, the whole change and transformation is on the side of the creation, in human society, with which the Word-made-flesh identified himself” (p.111). Here Chethimattam joins hands with those who are more concerned about what is known as functional Christology and also those who are committed to a Christology from below. He warns his readers that “theology is not an ontology of God nor does it provide us with a photographic image of the inner reality of God. The changes and transformations implied by the Incarnation and the whole salvation process could not imply any change in God, but only in the humanity of Jesus and in the human beings who are saved. The beginning of human salvation was what the Spirit of God accomplished in the humanity of Christ, to conform it to the person of the Son, who through his redemptive victory was constituted the Son of God for all humanity” (p. 112).

Chethimattam analyzes his reflections on the personality of Christ under several titles in his study on the human face of Jesus. He introduces the concept of the drama of salvation in which Jesus had to play his role in his total human condition. This anthropological approach of Chethimattam allows him to have a look at the psychological make-up of Jesus. He is not one who denies the human in order to affirm the divine, but rather one who affirms the human and thereby affirms the divine as well. According to Chethimattam, “the baptism incident and the subsequent theophany indicate a certain psychological maturing of Jesus with the discovery of the two basic concepts of his preaching and praxis throughout his ministry, namely, the loving care of God as Father and the startling power of the Spirit manifest in Jesus’ work”. Hence there is room for him to reflect on the consciousness of Jesus, which is primarily human and progressively divine. It is in this human consciousness that Chethimattam sees the temptations of Jesus insofar as the penance in the wilderness for forty days and the subsequent temptations were the most significant instances of a real humanity struggling towards

its own liberation (pp. 124 f). But what shows the best of the humanity of Jesus in the Gospels is his prayer life. As he states, “it is as the model adorer of God in the name of all humanity, as their representative, that Jesus accomplishes the work of salvation” (p. 126). According to Chethimattam, the mystery of the Trinity as presented in the New Testament through the personal experience of Jesus has an intense social meaning insofar as the Trinitarian ethics is basically personal. In God’s world everything is related. It is a promise that relatedness leads to greater communion, and also a threat that failure to establish community means diminution of humanity.

The challenge of Chethimattam’s reflections on the human face of Jesus reaches its culmination in the following statements: “The beauty of Jesus’ ministry is that it is genuinely human, coming out as it were naturally from the social and political situation in which he lived. Instead of being assisted at every moment with a divine view of things and served by a thousand angels, Jesus allows his life to be guided by the surrounding human factors.” Jesus’ knowledge was cumulative as that of any other human being. Jesus’ prediction three times of his own coming suffering and death shows that he had no clear idea of what fate was in store for him. With the fate of John the Baptist, and the fate of any one who challenged the establishment, he could easily see what his eventual fate would be. Hence he takes the precaution of moving out of the territory of Herod Antipas. It is in the context of this human condition of Jesus that we have to analyze the faith and prayer of Jesus through which he gained his awareness of his position and role as the Son of God. According to Chethimattam, faith was another name for the reign of God. For faith was not the acceptance of few truths about God and ourselves as coming from divine testimony, but rather the lived experience of all life and existence as God’s loving gift. It corresponds to the reign of God because it means our acknowledgement of God as the giver of all that we are and all that we have. It also means our involvement in the mixture of joy and gratitude, responsibility and generosity indicated by the ministry of Jesus (p. 133). Jesus was truly a man of faith. His faith flowed from the inner gift of the Spirit and the presence of the Father. He cherished all life and existence as God’s precious gift. Jesus spends

long hours in prayer often alone by himself and some times in the company of some of his disciples. He prayed before every important event in his ministry. The prayer Jesus taught his disciples clearly shows the consciousness of dependence on God.

According to Chethimattam, the resurrection is the highest point of Jesus' humanity. Often the resurrection of Jesus is taken as part of Christian apologetics to counteract the Jewish propaganda and to enable people to have faith in Jesus Christ which the life and death of Jesus could not have provided. It was used to restore the faith of the disciples, now destroyed by Jesus' death on the cross, as with the disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-34). But the resurrection of Jesus was not a mere return to his former life to be ascertained by empirical means. The resurrection is the conclusive proof that matter is destined not for disintegration, but rather for transformation in and through Jesus Christ. The entire material creation, which came into existence as part of God's eternal plan of salvation in and through Jesus Christ, will have a transformed state, and this is proleptically constituted through the historical as well as trans-historical event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the kingdom of God, which Jesus preached and partially realized through his historical ministry, became identified with the transformed reality of the risen Christ. This kingdom of God is something to be realized in this world itself. This takes place not as something that happens independent of the risen Christ, but as his ongoing activity and operation within history. It is this Jesus Christ who has captured the attention and concern of John Chethimattam. It is this Jesus Christ that we theologians have to encounter and it is his mission and message that we have to carry on in this world.

Question about the Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ

Is this Jesus Christ the unique Saviour of the entire humankind? This is a question that is being discussed all over the world, throughout Asia and, in particular, in India in the context of a growing awareness of its religious pluralism. Going through the flood of literature on this topic one gets the impression that, while asking this question, specific

groups of theologians have differing presuppositions and answers. Whereas for some the question can be accommodated to several other issues and a balanced position can be arrived at, for others it is a crucial question and, consequently, there is no compromise possible at all to avoid the *skandalon* of adhering to the traditional teaching of the Church.³ But it seems that the underlying concern of contemporary Christology in India is that we have to move out from an insistence on the centrality of the epistemological question about Jesus Christ. It means that we have to transcend the Nicene and Chalcedonian concerns and move towards more realistic concerns of our times. It also means that we have to move out from a Christology "from above" to a Christology "from below" and a Christology "to the other". It means that, in the place of an ontological Christology, which attempts to say who Jesus Christ is in himself, using ontological language marked by the traditional Scholastic clarity, precision and abstraction, we have to build up a functional and kerygmatic Christology, which tries to be inspirational without preoccupation with metaphysical precision. It means that we have to be more concerned with what Christ did than with what Christ is. It means that we have to move out from a Christology "within itself" towards a Christology which takes into account other important issues, such as the stark reality of religious pluralism and the poverty of the people, towards both of which Jesus of the Gospels had a very clear, positive and realistic attitude. Such a Christology focuses on the role Jesus played within history bringing people together and uniting them beyond caste, colour and creed, all within the larger framework of the kingdom of God which was the major content of his preaching and ministry. It is against the background of this larger context of the religio-cultural and socio-economic background of India that the more recent attempts to understand and interpret the mystery of Jesus Christ have been and are being made during the past quarter of a century and also thereafter.

When we discuss the various aspects of the Christological issues in India, a very important observation to be made is about the new

3 Cf. S. Athapilly, "The *skandalon* of the Uniqueness Jesus Christ. Some Critical Reflections" *Christian Orient* 11(1990) 103-119.

sense of identity which Indian theologians take upon themselves as the *élan vital* and rationale of their theological reflection. In the same way as India has regained its political freedom from the colonial powers before half a century, theologians in India have begun to experience and exercise a certain theological freedom in discussing theological and related issues within the framework of their own socio-economic and religio-cultural situations. One of the major preoccupations of colonial theology was the persistent attempt made by the Western theologians to make theology suit the overall theological and political purpose of the colonial powers themselves. Consequently, a mission theology was developed with its focus on the importance of becoming members of the Church in order to be saved, for which faith in the saving power of Christ as the unique Saviour of the world was a requirement. Biblical passages were cited and applied which were presented as emphasizing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of all humans. Since Christian theology was basically a Western product, there was no one to question such interpretations, and for several centuries this practice was continued without anyone questioning or challenging it. Now that the local Churches have regained their own legitimate freedom, their theologians also have begun to articulate their theological convictions with more courage and commitment. Christology seems to be one of the most appropriate branches of theology that have come up for authentic reflection and articulation in this country.

Various attempts have been made in India during the past several decades to articulate a Christology that is biblically sound, spiritually satisfying, theologically credible and pastorally helpful in a religiously pluralistic world. Hence, a relevant Christology for the Indian context must be characterized by the adequate response it can give to the complex religious and social situation of this country. S.J. Samartha through his work *One Christ – Many Religions. Towards a Revised Christology*⁴ has succeeded in contributing to this issue in a very substantial manner. According to him, in the same way as there is an

4 D. J. Samartha, *One Christ – Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology*, South Asia Theological Research Institute, Bangalore, 1992.

economic injustice in the relationship between the North and the South, there is also a theological injustice in the relationship between Christianity, which is the nominal religion of the rich and powerful North, and other religions followed by the poor and weak nations in the South. In the context of a renaissance of religions which takes a critical look at all religions in order to bring out the spiritual resources within them to sustain life and to draw out the liberative streams to support struggles for a just society, it is imperative to have a critical approach to the very meaning of Christ within the larger context of religions. Jesus Christ is the foundation of Christian faith, the basis of Christian life, and the inspiration of Christian witness and service in the world. Christologies are formulations of this faith in God through Jesus Christ in the process of being led by the power of the Spirit in history. The major missing factor in all Christologies so far developed in the West, and imported to other countries, is the fact of religious pluralism. Whether Christians like it or not, no Christology in the world, particularly in Asia today, can afford to ignore this factor.

With these reflections on the new foci of Christological discussions as decisive for the Indian interpretation of the meaning and message of Jesus Christ, it is also important to look back at two New Testament passages which were supposed to have exerted decisive significance for Christological discussions in the history of the church on the ground that they speak in the clearest terms for the uniqueness and universality of Christ in the realm of salvation. It may be also noted here that it is part of a general tendency among theologians to substantiate their theological positions through recourse to the interpretation of certain biblical texts, sometimes using a methodology which is not very critical and scientific. They were more in line with a methodology of confirming and substantiating conventional thinking and existing practice rather than the result of a contextualized approach to the meaning of the biblical texts themselves. Hence it is necessary to analyze the meaning of these biblical texts to see their meaning within the context of their articulation in the New Testament itself.

Review of the Biblical Basis for Traditional Christology

For the early Christians Jesus Christ was not one among the many who brought about salvation, rather he was *the Saviour*. This conviction

was strong in the early Church, and it was an expression of their inner experience rather than a claim they wanted to establish as part of their missionary propaganda. We select two such passages from the New Testament as representative of this conviction of the early Church and try to see their meaning in the Christological awareness of the early Church. The method used here is one of seeing the meaning of the text within the context, a principle which is being accepted as an important and valid one in the interpretation of the Bible.⁵ It must be emphasized that the primary aim of these passages in the New Testament writings was not to exclude anyone else from the realm of effecting salvation, but to urge all hearers and readers of the New Testament writings to take Jesus and his mission seriously as the authentic and authoritative manifestation of God's plan for the salvation of the humankind. Moreover, we have to analyze the passage in the context of its formulation.

The first one of these two passages, Acts 4:12, is part of Peter's speech before the Jewish Council, which is in response to a question of the members of the Council regarding the cure of the crippled beggar by Peter (Acts 3:1-10) and the consequent impact and sense of wonder it made on the public. Peter explained to them how the cure had happened through his faith in the *name of Jesus* (Acts 3:16). The result of this speech was that many people believed in Jesus Christ, making the number of the community of believers rise from three thousand to five thousand (Acts 4:4). Consequently, Peter and John were arrested and the next day they were brought before the Jewish Council. When questioned by the Council by what power or by what *name* they performed this miracle, Peter answered that the crippled man received his health "by the *name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*", and he cited Ps 118:22 to show how a rejected Jesus of Nazareth became the source of a divine cure. Then Peter added: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other *name* under heaven given among humans by which we may receive salvation" (Acts 4:12).

5 Joseph Pathrapankal, "Interpretation of the Word: God's Word, the human word and interpreter's word" in *Text and Context in Biblical Interpretation*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 1993, pp.1-16.

Ever since this official statement was made by Peter, it has been customary for Christians all over the world to defend the universal mediation of Jesus of Nazareth as the saviour of the whole humankind. Consequently, it has been also claimed that Christianity is the only true religion. A major observation that is to be made about this text is about the context in which Peter makes this statement. As referred to above, the context is that of a crippled beggar getting healed in the name of Jesus Christ. Hence the meaning of 'salvation' in this context is the healing and not what we usually understand by salvation in its eschatological sense. To take out such a passage from its immediate context and then to build up a whole theology of salvation with its eschatological meaning as something possible only through the name of Jesus Christ does not seem to be what the author had in mind, and it is a violence done to the text in the history of interpretation. Even the reference to the 'name' in this text with its absolute meaning is to be seen as related to the story of the healing of the crippled beggar. In the story itself 'name' is used three times (Acts 3:6,16) and it is this 'name' that is repeated in Acts 4:12 as the only one by which that 'salvation' was possible.

The second passage, 1 Tim 2:5, occurs in the context of the author of this letter instructing the readers about prayers and intercessions to be made for everyone because God wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The extension of the intercessory prayer as something to be offered for all people is based on the universal plan of God's salvation. "Knowledge of truth" in the Pastorals is a formula for the doctrinal contents of Christianity, and it should be made accessible to everyone. This is followed by a statement, about one God and one mediator, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all (vv.5-6). With respect to its form, this is not a credal formula or a confession, but rather a liturgical piece, as its style and content indicate. Moreover, the context is one of liturgical prayers. The contrast is not between one God and many gods, or between one mediator and many mediators, but rather, looking back to "all humans" (*pantes*), between *one* God and *one* mediator, and *all* who will be saved (cf. Rom 3:30; Eph 4:6). The statement about Christ can refer to the person or to his work. In hymns and liturgical pieces the former appears to dominate. Both elements are then combined in such a way that the statement about

the work is subordinated and taken as an interpretation of the statement about the person. The term 'mediator' (*mesites*) has mainly soteriological significance. The mention of 'man' (*anthropos*) in this connection is related to his work of becoming a self-offering for all, which is a variant of Mk 10:45. Here again, the question is whether the author of this letter wanted to make an absolute theological statement about the salvation of humankind understood in its totality, or as a statement about the faith of the community, of which he was a member, in order to strengthen them in their faith commitment to God and to Christ, whom they had already accepted as their Saviour through their faith commitment.⁶

When we try to understand the contextualized meaning of these two passages, we have to ask some crucial questions. What kind of language was the early Church using in its preaching and teaching when it claimed that salvation was possible in no other name than that of Jesus Christ or that Jesus Christ was the only mediator between God and the humans? For us who are living at a time of scientific precision and metaphysical certainty the language about the significance of Jesus Christ used by the early Church would appear to be doctrinal and absolute. It is precisely here that we have to see the difference between faith and confessional language, on the one hand, and doctrinal and metaphysical language, on the other. The former is the result of a faith commitment, which in our case is the commitment of Peter and the author of the Acts (Acts 4:12) as well as the author of 1 Timothy (1 Tim 2:5) to the person of Jesus of Nazareth, which faith they articulated as representatives of a believing community. The statement "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3) is not a metaphysically doctrinal statement, but rather it is a statement of faith and confession by the believers of the first century. It entirely depends on the recognition of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ and Son of God to arrive at this soteriological confession.⁷ It

6 Joseph Pathrapankal, "The significance of Jesus Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism: A Biblical Critique" in Errol D'Lima and Max Gonsalves, *What does Jesus Christ Mean? The Meaningfulness of Jesus Christ amid Religious Pluralism in India*" Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2002, pp.119-152.

7 "All the "one and only" adjectives used to describe Jesus belong "not to the language of philosophy, science, or Dogmatics, but rather

also necessitates a recognition of his death as having significance in terms of the religious concept of “our sins” and it requires that the cross, so far a symbol of ignominy, is recognized as a positive reality in accordance with the definite plan of God. In the same way, one can make a statement that “there is no other name under heaven given among humans by which we may receive salvation” (Acts 4:12), which again is more a faith and confession statement rather than a metaphysical and doctrinal statement which we can then apply to all peoples, irrespective to what religions they belong.⁸ In talking about Jesus, the New Testament authors use the language not of analytic philosophers but of enthusiastic believers, not of scientists but of lovers.⁹ Krister Stendhal calls it “religious language, love language, caressing language”.¹⁰

For believers in Jesus Christ this faith knowledge and doctrinal knowledge are one and the same. Consequently, it is quite natural for them to claim that their faith knowledge is the same as their doctrinal knowledge. But it is a step further when the same believers claim that their doctrinal knowledge is applicable to all, irrespective of to which religion and faith the others may belong. It is precisely this, what has happened in the early church and in the later history of the church. The faith commitment of the disciples of Jesus was such that for them it was at the same time a doctrinal commitment through which they tried to establish that Jesus of Nazareth was the unique and universal saviour of the entire humankind. That does not necessarily mean that it has metaphysical validity at all times, for all places, and for all, except for those who have in faith accepted Christ as their Saviour and Lord. In fact, all knowledge is interpreted knowledge and all perceptions of reality

to the language of confession and testimony.” Frances Young, “A Cloud of Witnesses” in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, John Hick (ed) SCM Press, London, 1977, p.13-47 as quoted by Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* p.184-185.

- 8 Cf. N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1967) pp. 234-245.
- 9 Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* p.185
- 10 Cf. “Notes for Three Bible Studies” in *Christ’s Lordship and Religious Pluralism* Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. 1981) pp.7-18.

are necessarily from the perspective of the perceiver, and when we are speaking of their meaning, we speak from a specific perspective. It is painful to recognize this truth, but it is a necessary one if we have to understand that God is the Lord of the entire historical process, and that he leads humanity in various ways; and various religious traditions have contributed their own share in evolving the meaning of religion and salvation.

Parameters of an Indian Christology

Hence, a meaningful and relevant Christology for India must take two major aspects into consideration, namely, India's religious pluralism and India's complex socio-economic reality. For any meaningful theological discussion it is necessary that we avoid all *a priori* statements. Moreover, it is important to remember that revelation is not merely a Christian concern, although the technical language is something Christian. It is a universal phenomenon of all religions and also of the entire cosmic process so much so that world history and salvation history are one and the same. It is within this larger perspective that theologians have to discuss specific theological issues. As a matter of fact, in recent years the tension created by the encounter between theologians belonging to different Christological approaches is only increasing. The pluralistic approach is branded as a "relativization strategy" involving theological and psychological contradiction. It is to be forcefully maintained that when we speak of a pluralistic approach, it is not a relativization of one's own faith in Christ that is proposed, but rather an objective approach to the reality of religions in God's plan of salvation. For the believers in Christ, Christ is absolute and unique. There is no question of changing their loyalty from one religion to the other. What they have accepted as their conviction must be safeguarded and valued as a treasure and there is no compromise possible in religious commitment. Hence there is no theological or psychological contradiction involved in the pluralistic approach. On the other hand, there is a theological and psychological contradiction when theologians thrust their convictions and ideologies as applicable to all, ignoring the simple fact that others have their own convictions and ideologies, which are equally to be respected and appreciated.

The Second Vatican Council at one stage also had to face the problem of religious pluralism *vis-à-vis* the traditional doctrine of the universal

mediation of Christ. However, it may be observed that this awareness was only part of a typically European concern related to anti-Semitism, which the Church was struggling to get rid of, through a positive recognition of the positive role of Judaism in salvation history. It was only through further discussions on the whole issue of religion that the reality of religious pluralism became more or less recognized by the Council Fathers, and the ultimate result of this discussion was the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.¹¹ In spite of the many positive orientations this document has spelt out, it is a fact that many theologians, especially Western theologians, have not yet been convinced of the importance of this document and the positive values of other world religions. In a debate on the question of the interpretation of *Nostra Aetate* a Lutheran theologian, Mikka Ruokanen, made the following statement: “The religious substance of non-Christian religions have no specific role as a medium of hidden salvation in terms of the theology of creation and natural law....Non-Christian religions are neither demonised nor divinised; they are seen as naturally good.”¹²

As a whole, Western theologians are still very much preoccupied with their traditional claims of the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity and what they do often is nothing more than a concession to other religions, that they “have a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”¹³ It is within the framework of this Western bias that in the past theologians

- 11 The very expression *Non-Christian Religions* as applied to other religions is symptomatic of a superiority complex Christians have towards the followers of other faiths, and it is all the more so in a country like India where Christians constitute only some five percent of the population. The fact that it has been used for centuries without anyone opposing this practice is no justification to continue to do the same even in our times.
- 12 Mikka Ruokanen, “Catholic Teaching on Non-Christian Religions at the Second Vatican Council” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol 14, No. 2. April 1990, p. 61.
- 13 Cf. The critical study by Sita Ram Goel, “Hindu-Christian Encounters” in *Voice of India* (New Delhi: 1989), p. iv.

spoke about “anonymous Christians”.¹⁴ According to P. Hacker even this concession to non-Christians is not justified because it has watered down the uniqueness of Jesus’ person and work.¹⁵ It has to be mentioned that the language in which other religions are qualified in the documents of the Church are also not sufficiently positive. There is a spirit of accommodation in which other religions are qualified, such as they are having “elements which are true and good”, “precious elements of religion and humanity”, “seeds of contemplation”, “elements of truth and grace”, and “seeds of the word”. At the same time, it is also to be remembered that the step taken by the Church back in 1965 was really a bold one considering the cautious attitude of the majority of the Fathers of the Council and theologians. As Augustine Cardinal Bea, the chief architect behind *Nostra Aetate*, has put it, this Declaration ought to lead to effective action. Its principle and spirit should inspire the lives of all Christians, so that the spirit of dialogue already initiated by the Popes during the previous years may bear fruits. The Cardinal said: “It is in the fruits which this Declaration should and will have after the Council that its main importance lies... The Declaration on the Non-Christian Religions is indeed an important and promising beginning, yet no more than the beginning of a long and demanding way towards the arduous goal of a humanity whose members feel themselves truly the sons (and daughters) of the same Father in heaven and act on this conviction”.¹⁶

Ever since, much progress has been made in the understanding of religious pluralism, and this has consequently also contributed towards a realistic appraisal of Christological issues. However, it seems that Christian

14 Cf. K. Rahner, “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions” in *Theological Investigations*, no. 5, pp. 115-134. In his essay “Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church” published in 1970 Rahner maintained that “anonymous Christianity does not render explicit Christianity superfluous, but rather itself demands it”. Cf. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 12 p. 174.

15 Cf. P. Hacker, *Theological Foundations of Evangelization*, St. Augustin, 1980, pp. 61-70.

16 Augustine Bea, quoted from Fesquet, *Le Journal du Concile*, ed. by R. Morel, 1966, p. 120.

theologians are caught up in a dilemma. On the one hand, they have to safeguard the traditional teaching about the uniqueness and universality of Christ as something through whom the salvation of all humans has to be achieved. On the other hand, they have been given new directives to appreciate the positive values of other religions, the acceptance of which truth will not only affect their traditional theological position but also the delicate dimension of their personal faith. Some theologians take the bold step to face the challenge and explain the problem, if not to solve it, while others prefer the safe way. But we have to recognize the fact that nothing, including theology, is in a state of *being*, but rather in a process of *becoming*. Centuries back Heraclitus observed that "everything flows" and that we cannot step into the same river twice. There is need of courage and optimism.

It does not make much sense to say that Christian theologians have to face the inconveniences and the bitter consequences of their being bold to defend the scandal of the uniqueness of Christ, claiming that suffering is also part of believing in and following Christ, as it happened to the early Christians. Theology and faith become relevant not only through the acceptance of the *skandalon* of the cross but also through *kenosis*, the way in which Christ emptied himself and took the form of a slave and became obedient unto death. The claims theologians often make about their faith in and commitment to Christ as the basis of their defending the unique and universal significance of Jesus Christ seem not so much a sign of a radical option they have taken for the cause of Christ as a tenacious adherence to the concept of a triumphant Church with its dominating tendency in everything that is related to orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

When Christian theologians today try to defend and establish the significance of Jesus Christ in the context of religious pluralism in terms of uniqueness and universality, it is clear that they do so from their own profound conviction. But there is a feeling among many theologians living among the other major religions of the world and reflecting on issues of religion, faith and ethics and at the same time committed to their faith in Christ as their unique saviour, that there is still a Western hegemony and intellectual colonialism exercised in this field, something similar to and a continuation of the age-old political and economic colonialism of the past

centuries. The manner in which the significance of Jesus Christ was explained in the philosophical theology of the West during the past several centuries and practised in the mission of the Church has remained the only and normative language we have inherited and still practised in much of our theological discussions. As long as this Western bias prevails in theological reflection, it will be difficult to develop a genuine theology of religions which is encouraged by the documents of Vatican II, such as *Ad Gentes*¹⁷ and *Nostra Aetate*,¹⁸ but not sufficiently explored by the community of theologians. It has been often maintained that the task of theologians is not so much to accommodate their theological reflection to issues resulting from religious pluralism as to concentrate on the unique and universal significance of Jesus Christ as the basis of and the incentive to the mission of the Church. It seems that there is need of a shift of emphasis from the missiological to the theological concerns of Christology.

17 "From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life. If this goal is to be achieved, theological investigation must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area, as it is called. In this way, under the light of the tradition of the universal Church, a fresh scrutiny will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known, which have been consigned to sacred Scripture, and which have been unfolded by the Church Fathers and the teaching authority of the Church. Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek for understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples" (*Ad Gentes*, art. 22).

18 Referring to the profound significance of *Nostra Aetate*, Cardinal Bea, the chief architect behind this document, said: "The Declaration on the Non-Christian religions is indeed an important and promising beginning, yet no more than the beginning of a long and demanding way towards the arduous goal of a humanity whose members feel themselves truly the sons (and daughters) of the same Father in heaven and act on this conviction. It is in the fruits which this declaration should and will have after the Council that the main importance lies" (A. Bea, quoted from Fesquet, *Le Journal du Concile*, ed. by R. Morel, 1966, p.120).

Mission cannot be seen as the numerical expansion of one religious community leading to a corresponding diminution of other communities. If mission is understood as sharing in the continuing work of God mending the brokenness of creation, overcoming the fragmentation of humanity, and healing the rift between humanity, nature and God, then possibilities of co-operation between various religions will be the ideal image of mission.¹⁹

What India today needs very much is the translation of this liberating presence of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is also a very meaningful and relevant manner in which the Church can articulate its openness to and appreciation of other religions. It is true that Christianity is a religious minority in India. Being a minority, Christianity should try to keep pace with the growth process of the nation. Following the example of Jesus, Christians should take the lead to work towards respecting the universal values of justice, equality, non-violence, love and compassion. They must take up the cause of effectively promoting the cause of human rights by joining hands with all peoples, movements and associations working for the defense of human and civil rights. Following in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, Christians should live and work in solidarity with subaltern groups. This alone would enable the Church to be in reality a Church of the poor and the marginalized and an authentic Indian Church. Closely associated with the cause of the marginalized, is the place of women in the Indian society. With its great ideology of the equality of men and women (Gal 3:28), Christians must take up the cause of women, which many religions in India are not very much interested in. In order to realize this, the Church must, first of all, remove all that is discriminatory in its own system regarding women and promote a sense of dignity of women in the larger society and its operation.

All Christologies at any place and at any time need to be grounded in the testimony of the New Testament. Without anchorage in the New Testament one is inclined to make Christological claims that go beyond the testimonies of the Scriptures. Moreover, a New Testament

19 Cf. S.J. Samartha, *One Christ-Many Religions*, p.14.

foundation is absolutely necessary for all Christologies to retain their ecumenical character. Christology can never be a narrow individualistic, nationalistic or parochial enterprise. It is the task and responsibility of the Church in the world to maintain this ecumenical dimension of Christological reflection. There is no question of confronting one Christology with another Christology. Hence an Indian Christology which is interpreted in some circles as trying to stand against the Christologies of the West is an excluded issue and a false propaganda. An excess of nationalistic zeal over Christian solidarity and common sense is a poor motivation for any Christology anywhere in the world. At the same time, it is also important to recognize the legitimate freedom of theologians in a religiously as well as socio-culturally pluralistic world to articulate their theological convictions as part of their Christian commitment. In a very convincing manner John Chethimattam has contributed his share and powerful insights towards understanding the person of Jesus Christ and discovering his human face.

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Chethimattam's Contributions Towards A Theology of the Church

Kuncheria Pathil

John Britto Chethimattam was one of the modern pioneers of Indian Christianity and Indian theology. Though academically he began his career as a philosopher committed to dialogue of Indian religions, very soon he proved himself to be an articulate Indian theologian and contributed very much to the development of modern Indian Christian theology. On the one hand, he always asserted the unique role of Jesus Christ in human salvation. On the other hand, he unambiguously affirmed the value and role of other religions in the one plan of God for human salvation. Interreligious dialogue is for him the attempt and means to relate Christian revelation to God's revelation in other religions. The role of the Church is to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus of establishing or preparing the way to the 'Kingdom of God' and all religions are contributing their share towards the realization of the Kingdom of God. In this article Kuncheria Pathil, who is both a student and colleague of JBC, highlights the ecclesiological reflections of Chethimattam.

The Background

John Britto Chethimattam (hereafter as JBC) began his academic career with specializations in Indian and western philosophies and he was known for his contributions to Indology and Hindu-Christian dialogue. His very wide readings and study in philosophical and theological literature as well as his long teaching experience both in India and abroad in various branches of philosophy and theology provided him a solid launching pad. Although he wrote on a vast number of topics, during his last period he was struggling with the

question of religious pluralism and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and in my opinion, his original and major contribution is in the area of theology of religions. Towards the end of his life he showed a great passion for the ‘historical Christ’ and his last book, *Towards A Theology of Intercommunion*, witnesses to his struggles with this question and his research in contemporary Christology and NT studies.¹

JBC rejects categorically the extreme view of traditional Christianity, which looked at the other religions very negatively, rejected their legitimacy and asserted that Christianity alone is the exclusive way of salvation. JBC equally rejected the radical pluralism, represented by John Hick and others, which maintains that all religions are equal and are different as well as independent ways of salvation. While holding the legitimacy of other religions and the value of religious pluralism as part of the heritage of the entire humanity, JBC maintains the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. Of course, with the coming of Jesus Christ into human history, the other religions have not become obsolete, rather all religions, as the common heritage of the entire humanity, are invited to meet each other and challenged to be enriched learning from one another. Each religion is called to make its own specific contribution to humanity.

This central vision of JBC and his theological edifice is built on seven pillars. In an article he wrote in *Jeevadhara* in 1991, he listed the “seven pillars of an Indian Christian theology” as follows:

(1) Theology is not primarily a search for an ‘ontology of God’ for the human, but rather an anthropology of the human for God. All religions witness to the search for the answers of the existential questions and problems of humanity, like human origin, the question and meaning of suffering, and final destiny of the human.

(2) There is unity of the divine economy of human salvation of all human beings. Jesus Christ is not a monopoly of Christians nor Buddha of Buddhists. All religious founders and their messages are the common heritage of all humans, though the specific contributions

1 JBC, *Towards A Theology of Intercommunion*, Rome and Bangalore: CIIS and Dharmaram Publications, 2001.

and demands of one religion may be radically different from those of others.

(3) The different religions are inter-related. No religion originated in a vacuum. Buddhism arose in reaction to Hinduism and Christianity was originally a reform movement in Judaism. The personalist pluralism of Christian conception of the Godhead has to be seen in tension with the non-dualism of Advaita and the emptiness doctrine of Buddhism.

(4) Faith is a divine free gift offered to all human persons. Religions only try to interpret this basic divine gift of faith. Though it is the faith of the Church that is shared by all individual members, the Church itself is ultimately a celebration of the faith received by each individual from the Spirit of God.

(5) The fundamental point of contact among all religions is the Scriptures, recognized by all as the work of the Spirit, word of God in human words.

(6) The central point of Christianity is the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus of Nazareth, and hence the primary importance of the 'human consciousness of Jesus'. Though he is ontologically the Son of God, the man Jesus had to realize that divine sonship through faith and to learn by obedience. Hence the concern of theology is not God "becoming" human as if it were some change in God, but the change it effected in humanity by the personal stamp of the Logos and the sanctifying activity of the Spirit in Jesus who grew in age, knowledge and wisdom.

(7) The scope of Christian missions is not the establishment and growth of the Church but the realization of God's Kingdom. Jesus, the Son of God, is the Kingdom and the religions including the Church only his sacrament.²

I thought I should start from this "center" of JBC's thinking and proceed to present his reflections on the Church from this background. There is often a complaint against JBC that he has not been coherent

2 John B. Chethimattam (hereafter as JBC), "The Second Millennium of Christianity: Its Positive Contribution", *Jeevadhara*, XXIX, 173 (1999), 330-31.

and consistent in his thinking and writings. In my opinion, though he seemed to be inconsistent in his discussions and interventions, his writings in general, especially his last two theological books, show to a large extent consistency and clarity.

The Historical Christ and the Church as a Movement

Christianity is a movement that began with the historical Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, rather than a particular doctrine or a static system of beliefs and practices with a well-structured institution and organization. Jesus was a historical person, an itinerant preacher, a Rabbi, who lived during the rule of Pontius Pilate as the governor of Judea, who condemned him and crucified. What we know about Jesus today is from the movement itself and not from the secular historical documentation. The New Testament books witness to the immediate experience of the believers themselves who began to reflect on the founder of the movement, on his life, teachings, works, death and resurrection, but the movement is presented as a divine offer of salvation for all human beings. In the Palestinian socio-political milieu of Roman colonial rule, under which the vast majority of the people became poor, oppressed and marginalized Jesus, instead of aligning himself with or encouraging the resistance movement of the Zealots or following the isolationism of the Essenes, proclaimed the breaking in of the “Kingdom of God”.³ Jesus addressed to the hearts of the poor, sinners and prostitutes and responded to their deepest needs. By gathering the disciples and commissioning them to continue to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, Jesus founded the movement of the Church. According to the NT writers, by his death and resurrection Jesus accomplished human salvation. By the incarnation and especially by the resurrection, Jesus entered into history and guides it from within. The message of the early Church was simple: God our Father has called all human beings to be sons and daughters in His one Son, Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church is the community of the believers open to all, and it is a reconstituted humanity.⁴

3 JBC, *Towards a Theology of Intercommunion....*p.75.

4 JBC, “What is Christianity?” in *We Christians: A Self-Introduction*, edited by JBC, Trivandrum: CMI Publications, 1996, pp. 13 – 16.

It is very improbable that Jesus stipulated any specific structure or organizational pattern for the community. The earliest Christian communities quite probably functioned within the structures and organizational system of Judaism. The Church was simply understood as the community of Jesus' disciples gathered together under Jesus' invisible but dynamic presence. Mt 18: 20 "When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them". This understanding of the Church is referred to by many of the early Fathers.⁵ The Acts of the Apostles succinctly describes the structural organization of the first Christians: "So those who received his word were baptized and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers" (Acts 2: 41-42). According to JBC, the early Christian communities functioned in a way similar to the Qumran community of the Essenes, emphasizing 'community' (Koinonia) and unity, common life (the Way), sharing of goods etc.⁶ It is admitted by all that the hierarchical structures of the Church, such as, the threefold ministry of bishops, priest and deacons, the liturgical functions and the sacramental system developed much later, except the simple rituals of Baptism and the Breaking of the Bread that may be traced in the early communities.

The Church was understood primarily as a 'spiritual movement' and not merely a social movement. The two fundamental principles for the new community were the presence of the risen Jesus in their midst and the constant availability of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It was the faith in the risen Jesus that gathered them together. It was the Spirit that commanded Peter to eat with Cornelius, the gentile, and to receive him and family into the community. It was the Spirit that directed Philip to speak to and convert the Ethiopian minister. The Spirit guided the missionary journey of Paul. The gift of the Spirit given at the day of Pentecost guided them in all things.⁷

5 JBC, "Constructing an Indian Ecclesiology" in *Third Millennium*, V (2002) 1, p. 51.

6 JBC, "The Church" in *We Christians*, p. 173.

7 JBC, "What is Christianity?" in *We Christians*... p. 170.

Evolution of the Church and the Divisions

JBC's last book, *Towards a Theology of Intercommunion*, is, in fact, the story "how the religious movement that started with Jesus of Nazareth evolved in response to different cultural contexts into 'Christianity', how it was given a Western twist under the Roman emperors who became Christians and made it the state religion and how it reacts to different human situations and human concerns today".⁸ As the Church existed in history and involved in the socio-economic, political and cultural realities, conflicts and tensions were inherent to it. The first conflict was between the Jewish and Hellenistic Christians as witnessed in the Acts of the Apostles. On the one hand, Jewish Christians wanted to impose all the Jewish practices including the circumcision upon the Hellenistic and Gentile Christians. On the other hand, the Hellenists did not approve the Jewish Christians continuing adherence to the Temple worship (Acts 7: 48-50). In the council of Jerusalem, led by Peter and James, a balanced view was accepted that the gentile converts should not be subjected to the law of circumcision, but they should observe those parts of the Law that were imposed formerly on the gentiles who lived among the Jews. But these differences among the early Christians did not create a lasting split in the Church.⁹

As the Church developed, the structures and patterns of ministry emerged naturally and spontaneously. With the death of the apostles and the appearance of many false teachers, who threatened the unity of faith, there was a felt need of authoritative leaders and teachers approved by the whole community. Therefore for every local Church elders or presbyters were either elected or appointed by the delegates of the apostles like Timothy and Titus, and one of the elders began to 'supervise' (*episcopos*) the matters of the community. Gradually a monepiscopal system developed in the Church.¹⁰ With the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine, the imperial administrative system and style was gradually copied in the Church. The prestige of Rome

8 JBC, *Towards a Theology of Intercommunion*... p. 14.

9 JBC, "The Church" in *We Christians*.... P. 174.

10 Ibid, pp. 174 – 175.

as the capital city and the place of the martyrdom of St. Peter, naturally gave the bishop of Rome a primacy among other bishops. The other principal cities, such as Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Constantinople, became Metropolitan and Patriarchal sees with a monarchical administration. "It was a universal practice everywhere that any breach of orthodox doctrine was considered an offense not only against the particular religion but also against the state. Religious authorities had only to pronounce one a heretic, the political authorities either executed him or banished him to the outskirts of the empire".¹¹ In the 'Holy Roman Empire' many powerful popes asserted both their temporal and spiritual authority and established the supremacy of the Church and the rights of the Church as a 'perfect society'. They asserted that the spiritual authority is above the temporal authority.

As Christianity began to spread rapidly in the Hellenistic world and became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the theological developments took place predominantly in the categories of Greek philosophy, especially in Platonic, Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian ways of 'essentialist' thinking, deviated from the Judaic personal thinking inherited by the Churches of the East. The Hebrew problematic was the existence of evil in a world created and governed by a good and all-powerful God and it demanded from the humans constant fidelity to the 'covenant' with Yahweh and personal commitment to him. The Greek problematic was the gap between the all-perfect God and the limitation and sinfulness of the humans for which the Platonic idea of mediation was the answer. Jesus, the pre-existent Logos became incarnate as a man and mediator in order to save humankind.¹² The Roman emperors who found that the doctrinal differences and diverse views would threaten the unity and the stability of the empire, convened the ecumenical councils to discuss and define the central doctrines of the Trinity and Christology and imposed the same Greek formulations on all the Churches. The tragic consequences were the divisions that happened among the Churches, into Catholic, Oriental

11 Ibid, pp. 179 – 180.

12 JBC, *Towards a Theology of Intercommunion...* p. 29.

Orthodox, Orthodox and later Protestant Churches that reacted to the entire scholastic theological system of the medieval period. According to JBC, "Recent scholarly analysis has made it clear that there was little substantial differences in faith between the different Churches and that the enduring divisions are purely political, social and cultural".¹³

Rediscovery of the Church as 'Communion'

The Western imperial model of the Church with emphasis on institution, hierarchy and administration and the Greek theology that accompanied it, which was more abstract and analytical, eclipsed the original New Testament concept of the Church as a communion, a "new way" of fellowship. The central theme of the last book of JBC is 'communion' (*Towards a Theology of Intercommunion*, 2001). The Vatican II and more especially the Roman Synod of Bishops held in 1985 rediscovered the Church as a 'communion'. The Council's central document, *Lumen Gentium*, presents the Church as a mystery, sacrament, 'a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity of humankind' rather than a hierarchical institution. Christian self-understanding is basically communion or communitarian. The heart of the communion is our relationship with the three persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The God-man communion is really and concretely established by the Word-made-flesh. In Jesus Christ every human person is related and united to God. It is this vertical communion the basis that generates the horizontal communion among the humans. The Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church and in the hearts of every person is the bond of this communion. The mystery of the 'ecclesial communion' should be thus understood both in its vertical and horizontal as well as visible and invisible dimensions.

What characterizes the Church's communion is not uniformity but great diversity. But as human person is a social being, communion requires both institutional and juridical forms to some extent.¹⁴ The Vatican II emphasized more the Communion of all Churches and

13 Ibid, p. 179.

14 Ibid, p. 162.

collegiality as well as co-responsibility of the bishops than the universal administrative set-up and the primacy of the pope. The local Church is not seen simply a unit or part of the universal Church, but the concrete realization of the Universal Church. In every local Church the Universal Church is fully present. And the local Churches could be really different in liturgy, traditions, laws and customs, formulations of faith with a rich plurality of theologies in response to the their actual socio-cultural and religious context. Communion calls for participation both in divine and spiritual gifts of faith, love and hope (communion in Word, Sacraments and worship) as well as participation in material gifts and blessings by common sharing. "The group of believers was one in mind and heart. None of them said that any of their belongings were their own, but they shared with one another everything they had". (Acts 4: 32).

The Church in Eastern Perspective

JBC very often speaks about Eastern approach and perspective in contrast to the Western. As there are two other papers, related to his Eastern and Indian approaches, I shall not elaborate this point here. But the term 'East' and 'Eastern' are not very clear in JBC. Some times it means the great Orthodox tradition of Eastern Christianity vis-à-vis the Western Christianity. Some other times he specifically refers to the East Syrian tradition. Very often for JBC the Indian tradition and approaches are indeed eastern.

While the Western approach emphasizes hierarchical authority, doctrinal formulations and definitions, the Eastern approach and method give more emphasis to personal experience (*anubhava*, "becoming one with the object") celebration and community. In the East, liturgy is the centre of Christian life and faith. It is in the liturgy that the believer experiences his/her faith and encounters the living Christ today. But liturgy does not mean simply a particular liturgical text or rubrics. Liturgical texts and rubrics cannot be absolutized: "The liturgical text and the set prayers though important do not constitute the liturgy. They become the liturgy only when they are made use of and set in action. Hence they cannot be made use of

mechanically like magical formulas. They have to take actual living form in the celebration of living persons".¹⁵

According to JBC in the Indian Vedic tradition 'sacrifice' is the source and origin of the entire universe and creation. Along the same line, he posits the origin of the Church from the supreme sacrifice at Calvary. The Church is 'the second Eve' born from the pierced heart of the 'second Adam' who is Jesus Christ.¹⁶

Ecumenism

The one communion of the Church is today apparently divided due to historical factors. How can we restore the one communion among the Churches? According to JBC, "the basic perception of ecumenism is that no single Church with its historical, social, cultural and political limitations can claim a full expression of the Gospel entrusted by Christ to his disciples. In the same way there is a growing perception that any single religion restricted by socio-cultural and political factors as it is, can fully account for the one religious history of humanity and for the one divine economy for human salvation. Though it is through Jesus of Nazareth that the creative Word of God made its definitive entry into human history, God has spoken to humanity at various moments through various prophets and religious leaders, whose messages are relevant for all the members of the human race. In fact faith is God's free gift to all his children".¹⁷

In fact ecclesiological and theological pluralism is clearly attested in the various New Testament books. "There is no *ecclesiologia perennis* or single permanent doctrine of the Church in the New Testament".¹⁸ The present divisions among the Churches are not exactly due to matters of faith and dogma, but due to social, cultural and political factors and the Churches today must honestly face them. What divides us today are "centuries of tradition regarding sharing of

15 JBC, "The Process of Decentralization in the Church", in *Jeevadharma*, No. 28 (1975), p. 309.

16 JBC, "Constructing an Indian Ecclesiology", in *Third Millennium*, V (2002) 1, p. 60.

17 JBC, *Towards a Theology of Intercommunion...* p. 263.

18 *Ibid.* p. 264.

authority between clergy and the laity, long standing privileges enjoyed by groups and individuals, and rites and ceremonies that have gained importance in each group".¹⁹ We must trace the common elements among the Churches that witness to the one communion of the early Church. The Churches must start with what they have in common.

The medieval ecclesiology was a pyramidal one, a "perfect society", with one single monarchical administration and government. But New Testament ecclesiology was a communion model with a communitarian experience based on the presence of the risen Lord and the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The unity among the Churches should be based on the common experience and communion among the faithful, not on agreement or uniformity on matters of government and administration or on uniformity in theology. Communion of the faithful should express itself in common witness and service to the needy as in the early Church. JBC proposes that the intercommunion among the Churches should take place first at the local level and based on the common denominators, such as, the memory of Jesus and his presence and the experience and the work of the Holy Spirit and the celebration of the "Lord's Supper" and not based on external rules and regulations.²⁰

In a similar way JBC also speaks about the inter-religious reality of the Church and the need of the communion among the various religions. The Church accepts the legitimacy of other religions and the differences among them. "No single religion can comprehend God, nor can all religions pool their experiences together and produce a composite picture of God".²¹ What are called for are mutual relationship and enrichment and moving towards a convergence and communion. As there other papers on the theology and philosophy of religions, I do not want to elaborate this point.

Church and Kingdom

As mentioned above, one of the pillars of JBC's theology is the breaking in of the "Kingdom of God" in the life, ministry, mission and

19 Ibid, p. 267.

20 Ibid, p. 275.

21 Ibid, p. 283.

in the very person of Jesus. The Church is called to continue this mission of preaching the “Reign of God”. The final goal of the mission of the Church is not the establishment and growth of the Church, but the realization of the Kingdom of God. Unlike the Zealots who stood for a political revolution to overthrow the foreign rule or the Essenes who withdrew from the present evil society and lived in isolation, Jesus called for repentance, reconciliation and change of life and to build up a new society by turning to God the Father and to the fellow men and women in love, (even loving enemies), communion and mutual sharing and thus to establish God’s reign and kingdom.²² JBC does not separate Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Jesus not only preached the Kingdom of God, but he is the embodiment of the Kingdom, which he established in his incarnation, life, death and resurrection by which he entered into human history, transforming and guiding it to its destiny as the Lord of history.²³

JBC clearly makes the distinction between Christ and the Church, and Kingdom and the Church. Though he is emphatic in asserting the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, he does not absolutize the Church. Religions, including the Church, do not save, but only point to salvation. Church is not the end, but the Reign of God. All religions are moving towards a center, communion of all peoples, the Kingdom of God, where the present boundaries between the religions do not matter much. To be a Christian means to attend to God’s voice coming from all quarters and to collaborate with all.²⁴ “The mission of the Church is not to grow and bring into its fold all the people in the world, but rather to be a minority institution in the service of the majority... The Church is the concrete expression of the sacramental principle that human beings can come in contact with God only through the material and social reality of human existence”.²⁵ “Evangelization is a work of mutual enrichment by which the wealth of all religions can be made available to all”.²⁶

22 JBC, *Towards a Theology of Intercommunion...* p. 75.

23 Ibid, p. 143.

24 Ibid, p. 193.

25 JBC, *We Christians...* p. 184 – 185.

26 JBC, *Towards a Theology of Intercommunion...* p. 304.

Concluding Remarks

(1) As a whole JBC's theological reflections on the Church are along the line of contemporary catholic ecclesiology, initiated by Vatican II. It rejects the pyramidal and monarchical ecclesiology and endorses an ecclesiology of communion, emphasizing the mystery of the Church, collegiality of bishops, role of the laity in the mission of the Church and the legitimate autonomy and diversity of the local Churches.

(2) While rejecting ecclesiocentrism and affirming the possibility of salvation to all even outside the boundaries of the visible Church, he emphasizes the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ and his unique mediation to all humans to become the 'sons and daughters of God'. By the incarnation and resurrection the Logos became the Lord of history and directs and guides it to its final destiny.

(3) For JBC, the risen Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit is present in the hearts of all and the gift of faith is given to all humans. Although he explicitly rejects the view of Karl Rahner's 'anonymous Christianity', in reality he seems to advocate the same in another language.

(4) The center of his theology is the historical event of incarnation, the Logos assuming humanity, and the humanity of Christ glorified as the Lord of history. In his latest New Testament studies he seems to struggle with the question of the historical Jesus and tries to establish the Church on the historical Jesus. But it seems to me that he has not fully grappled with the question and the tension between the 'Jesus of History' and the 'Jesus of faith'. In my opinion, faith in Jesus cannot be established by any amount of historical studies. For example, Jesus and Buddha, both were historical persons with exemplary and heroic life and sublime teachings and with a vast number of disciples and followers. How is one led to faith in Jesus as unique, universal and the only mediator and not to Buddha? Definitely not by mere historical studies, but by the gift of faith in Christ. That Jesus is risen, glorified and made the Lord of history and the unique savior of humankind is indeed a 'faith statement' and not a metaphysical or ontological statement.

Approaches to Inculturation and Liturgy

Louis Malieckal

The Author, a student and colleague of Fr. Chethimattam introduces here the reflections of JBC on culture and inculturation in general and on liturgical inculturation in particular. His approaches to inculturation has touched theological disciplines like Christology, Missiology, Theology of Religions etc. Religious faith and spiritual truths are in the realm of the abstract and transcendent and they need concrete socio-cultural realities and symbols to become enfleshed or incarnated therein. Religion is already a socio-cultural reality where faith has become inculturated. It is the Gospel that can become inculturated in a new culture and not Catholicism which is already one particular form of the inculturation of the Gospel. Proper inculturation can be done only by prophets and not by ritual-centred priests. Above all, worship is to be understood not merely as God-centred activity, but as a community-centred for the building up of the human community under the Reign of God.

Fr. Chethimattam's reflections on the question of inculturation span a wide spectrum of areas like Christology, Missiology, Dialogue, Theology of Religions and so on, and as such border on the concept of Indigenization or contextualization of Theology. On the other hand, he has not written much directly on liturgical inculturation, as far as I have gone through his writings. Probably in this case he was constrained not to express his mind freely so that he might not displease the watchful eyes of some higher ecclesiastical authorities, especially of the Syro-Malabar Church, of which he was a devoted and faithful son. At the same time, we can see that, his ideas about theologizing in context and inculturation in general must have logically lead him to

articulate liturgical inculcation more expressively. Whatever be the case, he has left behind some food for thought on how to go about liturgical inculcation as well.

Culture and Religion: Their Mutual Influence and Impact

From a Christian point of view inculcation may be broadly understood as a process of cultural adaptation of the truths of Christian religion. Therefore in our enquiry about the author's reflections on Inculcation let us start with his understanding of this twin subject – culture and religion, and their inter-action.

In his article “Religion the Cutting Edge on Culture”¹ our revered writer admits that culture according to sociologists is the sum total of values, customs, rituals and laws transmitted from generation to generation to define a community's collective identity; that religion on the other hand is the expression of the ultimate concern of human life.² Elsewhere he states that, ‘there is much confusion about culture itself’ and after referring to Clifford Geertz, Durkheim, Weber, Freud and Malinoski, he quotes Clifford to say that “Culture denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life”.^{2a}

He then goes on to examine and explain their mutual impact: Culture is a larger reality than religion. It may enshrine many values even negative or anti-religious values, and thus it may distort religion. However religion is one of the most prominent elements that will make up culture, even as culture will remain as the means and medium of religious expressions. Citing the example of Christmas celebration in the West, Dr. JBC (as he was fondly known among his students) shows that it manifests the structure of an alienated society/culture

1 Jeevadhara vol.30 (2001)pp.349-365

2 Cfr. Ibid. p.349

2a “Indian Culture and Christian Civilization”, in Kanichikkattil Francis Ed. *Church in Context* (Essays in honour of Mathias Mundandan CMI), Dharmaram Publications, 1996, pp.139-152 (142).

which tries to compensate for its alienation by a sort of 'gift-giving' practice among nuclear families. In this process the notion of the Church as a great fellowship in which members stand in solidarity and mutual support, is conveniently overlooked. Instead, the existing practice of a mass of isolated families being engaged in a great shopping spree is a caricaturing of the Church as a community. In other words the Western celebrative culture gives a distorted meaning to the religious festival of Christmas.

However this is not the case in the celebration of Easter, the author says. Namely, Easter continues to mark the change and renewal in the socio-cultural order. The crucified Jesus continues to represent the rejection of a sinful world and to rage against a corrupt social order. Resurrection stands as a promise of transcendence of the human spirit and re-constitution of a new humanity. The Easter celebration thus places emphasis on the Church as the new socio-cultural unity in the place of the nuclear families. In other words there is 'instrumentalization of religion by culture' both in its negative and positive aspects.³

JBC then points out the impact on society when religion settles down for an unholy alliance with culture. Thus the firm grip that a patriarchal culture has on religion and its values is shown by the inferior place assigned to women in most of the religions like Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For example, in Hinduism a woman in her childhood is subject to the father, in marriage to her husband and in later life to her son, and hence is the preference for a male child in a Hindu family. For Judaism and Christianity, God is the Father not mother. The Bible was written from a male perspective. Hence the woman (Eva) was created out of a rib of the man (Adam). Catholic Church excludes women from ordination to priesthood on the pretext that God became incarnate as man. "But it is not clear", JBC makes a veiled criticism of the official Church, " why the other specific conditions of Christ like race, religion, time and economic situation, are not taken as restrictive of the priesthood." If all these cultural factors, the author seems to underscore, are not obstacles to priesthood

of the Church, why should only gender be an obstacle, which is also a cultural factor.⁴

Criticizing the Marxian way of relating religion and culture, ideology and science, JBC says that one has to distinguish between mystifying religious ideologies which justify the existing social order (culture) and the future-oriented religious ideologies which challenge the existing social order and encourage people for social transformation. In the encounter between religion and culture, no religion including Christianity, he says, is a pure ideology which could be applied to any situation like a Platonic world of ideas. *The Gospel of Jesus Christ can be communicated to any culture, live in it, transform it and achieve in it a new self-expression; but the same cannot be said about Christianity or Catholicism. For, Catholicism itself is a particular embodiment of the Gospel, a religious culture.* We are here closer to the author's mind regarding the question of 'inculturation'. "Each religious culture, provides doctrinal frame work and community organization in order to impel and direct people to act. In the face of a new situation these ready-made frame works have to be left behind ."⁵

However the history of all religions, he goes on to explain, presents a different story: In trying to communicate one's religious insights to others, every religion has been militant because of its identification with a particular culture or political structure. The story of the spread of Buddhism in India and Sri Lanka during the reign of Ashoka, and its later disappearance from India during the time of Hindu kings is a classical example of this militancy. He goes on to show that Christianity and Islam which arose in the shadow of a foreign culture eventually became militant for their own survival, each with the conviction that its secret doctrine was the only true and necessary means of salvation whether in Europe, Middle East or America.

4 Ibid.pp353f.

5 This observation again shows his conviction about the need of re-interpretting Christian Dogmas in new cultural settings (see pp. 355f).

Indigenous Theology Or Theological Contextualization

JBC in his article, “Inculcating Our Theological Thinking”⁶ gives us to understand better his mind regarding the question of inculturation. He says that as late as 1999 when the late Pope John Paul II released in Delhi the Roman Synodal document “Church in Asia” the word “Inculturation” was frequently used by different speakers in radically different meanings: For some, it stands as a “mere strategy to make Christianity look less offensive to Asians”, in the sense of “interculturality, confrontation between different religions set in radically different cultural frameworks, each one believing itself culturally superior to others and trying its best to make itself understood by the other.” For some others, “inculturation is limited to stating one’s religious doctrine in the categories and symbols of the other.” But JBC is not happy with these meanings of it and so quotes the words of Cardinal Darmaatmaja, the President Delegate of the Synod for Asia from his concluding words of the ceremony of releasing the Roman Document mentioned: “Being Church in Asia to day means participating in the mission of Christ the Saviour in rendering his redemptive love and service in Asia, so that Asian men and women can more fully achieve their integral human development....bringing the good news into all dimensions of human life and society and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”⁷ And by way of summing the thoughts on this matter he adds that “here rarely there is an effort made to step into the cultural shoes of the other and walk with him up the religious path.”⁸ Hence we can

6 Jeevadharma vol.29(2000)pp.419-443

7 Here Dr. JBC first gives a summary of the different approaches to the practice of inculturation by different people; he is not very happy with these approaches, and then proposes his way of understanding it, see p.419.

8 If we look at his ‘definition’ of inculturation closely we can see that for him the process of inculturation involves two steps, first a dying with the local culture (stepping into the shoes of the other, and secondly rising with him to walk with him ‘up the religious path’, namely the process requires an incarnational annihilation and a rising up in the power of resurrection

say that for him Inculturation is “the effort made to step into the cultural shoes of the other and walk with him up the religious path.” According to our author, the NT writers, unlike their contemporary Greek writers, did not fall into the temptation of enquiry into the ontology of God as a rational justification for a life of faith, instead they “inculturated the Gospel message in the concrete situations they encountered. They did not attempt an ideological presentation of Christ and his teachings but only faced the actual socio-cultural situation in the light of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”⁹ For him inculturation is not a cosmetic ceremony of putting on the dress-code of an alien culture on one’s religious faith to make it appealing in that cultural set-up. He says that for better models of this inculturation what actually needed is to examine how Christianity inculturated itself to the thoughts and concerns of the people of the first century to whom it was communicated.

If we go to the origins in the first century, the Kingdom of God broke into history through the life-intervention of Jesus Christ. The apostles who received this message and had a direct encounter with the risen Lord took this message to the different parts of the world, to concrete situations of life. When this message was committed to writing it was not in the form of a systematic treatise but as presentation of the Christ-event to actual contexts. In other words, the gospel was not proclaimed as an ideology or as a program of action. Jesus Christ, the Word of God was dynamically proclaimed and actualized in different socio-cultural contexts which gradually gave rise to different ‘theological manuals’ of the New Testament.^{9a} This diversity of ways in which the Gospel was actualized and Jesus, the Word of God presented in the documents of the New Testament

9 Ibid.p.420. Dr. Chethimattam makes the same point here which I made in the previous foot note, namely any inculturation must have before it Jesus’ death-resurrection paradigm.

9a For example, the author considers the Gospel of Matthew as a “Manuel of righteousness”, that Mark as a “Manuel of the Suffering Servant”, that of Luke as the “Manuel of Compassion”, that of John as a “Manuel of the New Christian Community” etc. see Ibid.pp.427-435.

raises the question how Jesus can be actualized in the modern world; because he is not an ideology nor a program of action, says the author. In the 27 documents of the NT the same Jesus, the Word of God, is presented as emerging out of radically different human situations as the divine answer to man's basic concerns, as the explosion of God's rule and kingdom.¹⁰

Contextual Theology as Missiology

In proclaiming Jesus to India, says the author, the task of the Christian missionary is to show what unique meaning and message of salvation Jesus brings to India, which is different from the contributions made by other religions in their particular historical contexts. Therefore according to the author "evangelization is mostly inter-religious dialogue, enquiring from followers of other religions how God has spoken to them in history and showing them one's own religious heritage." Here one has to look at Christian faith before it was expressed through the writings of the NT, Ecumenical Councils and Dogmatic proclamations of the Magisterium, "when becoming a Christian was just a matter of confessing Jesus as Lord and Saviour."¹¹ JBC's mind on the question of the salutary nature of other religions would appear quite open and broad as he says that the "plurality of religions is no challenge to the Church in India. It has to be realized that what these different religions present are dimensions of the faith we profess, God's free gift to all his children, dimensions which we may have neglected or forgotten."¹²

- 10 Having first discussed the different patterns of inculturation of the Gospel when the early disciples of Jesus moved out of the Palestinian context to the Greek, Roman and other world cultures, the writer takes up the question of proclaiming Jesus in India (see pp. 427 to 436)
- 11 In order to face the task of proclaiming Jesus in India, he says, "What actually needed is to examine how Christianity inculturated itself to the thinking and concerns of the peoples of the first century to which it was communicated. Though born in the Palestinian context of Judaism it too abandoned its presuppositions...." (see p.427)
- 12 Ibid. p.436

Contextualized Christology

JBC in his article “Asian Jesus: The Relevance of Jesus Christ in the Asian World of Religious Pluralism”¹³, while explaining the historical fact that Christianity had spread in the Greek world in the very first centuries after Christ, attributes its reason mainly to the idea of inculcation or contextual theologizing of the gospel message. He says, “The early preachers of the Christian Gospel in the Greek world like Paul and Luke were forced to adopt a philosophical thought pattern and style of spirituality of the Greek, taking care however to maintain the Jewish core of Christ’s teaching..... What happened in this passing of Christianity from the Palestinian Judaic back ground to the Greek world was a contextualization of the image of Christ.”¹⁴

Liturgical Inculcation

As was mentioned earlier, we have to understand the mind of JBC regarding the question of inculcation as such and liturgical

13 Jeevadhara vol. 26(1997)pp.299-310

14 Ibid p.300. While discussing the western contextualization of Christology, Dr. JBC points out the draw backs of the Greek thinking in accommodating the Hebrew thinking: In accommodating the Hebrew idea of the broad notion of the “Son of God” to the demands of the Greek conceptualist thinking, Christian thought ran into great difficulties. The Greek answer to this problem was the concept of a mediator who would bridge the infinite gulf or distance between God and the material world. Thus presenting Jesus as the Mediator, the 4th and 5th century theologians argued against Arians, Appollinarians and Nestorians and safeguarded the divinity and humanity of the one Mediator, between God and human beings. And yet the tendency was to picture Jesus as a Creator-God, a sort of Demiurge by the side of the Supreme Being. Similarly, as the Greek thinking did not have a proper place for myth and legend as presented in the Bible, something between mere fantasy and truth, the Greek fathers went for a literal interpretation of the Biblical narratives, like the six-day creation, sin of the first parents by eating the forbidden fruit etc. Besides, in this Greek contextualization of Christianity Jesus became part of an ideology or creed to be confessed than a person to be encountered and experienced. This led to the Christian absolutism of the Middle Ages and the consequent religious conquest of the colonial period.

inculturation in its particular sense against the back ground of his reflections on contextualization, religious dialogue etc. Dr. Chethimattam holds that the word inculturation is very ambiguous and so people try to avoid its use for various reasons: Some avoid as it implies the denial of an existing Christian culture and creation of a new culture. Some others who consider it unavoidable, try to interpret it in Pre-Vatican paradigms, like 'conversion', 'Church founding', 'integration', 'acculturation' and 'assimilation'. For still some other people it is the readiness to get rid of colonialism and ethnocentrism and recognition of the other as the principle of identity for the Church. The basic principle, he thinks, is "see reality, make a theological judgement and act pastorally."¹⁵

According to our revered writer, *the process of inculturation is oriented to a better treatment of human beings rather than a better understanding of God*. Hence the value of religion should be seen in so far as it makes human culture hospitable to God's children. Inculturation therefore must lead to the removal of the oppressive nature of religious practices. All this shows his dislike for ritualism and for mere cosmetic cultural adaptations. And so he says, "Worship centers in God in order to bring men together in fellowship as his children or as seekers of the Ultimate Reality", and considers, "this element of fellowship as the fundamental aspect of worship."¹⁶ Creating the world, God entered into his own creation; worship and ritual/ liturgy attempts to re-capture and repeat the original irruption of the Divine into human history. Therefore, he observes, in man's search for the eternal in the temporal, worship symbolism has become the point of this passage to the transcendent, and adds, "For this very reason symbols have to be fully human expressing man's aspirations, needs and pre-occupations, and at the same time contain a certain guarantee of God to whose worship they tend."¹⁷ Besides,

15 See his article "Religion the Cutting Edge of Culture" cited above in no.1, p.357

16 "Nature and Scope of Inter-religious Dialogue To day", in *Jeevadhara* vol.21(1992)pp.331-355 (330)

17 Ibid.p.337

Dr. JBC makes a reference to the Council and warns the liturgists of two dangers, in the words of Louis Bouyer: “ Taking refuge in an immobile traditionalism, in which liturgy would petrify, and of rejecting altogether the domain of the sacred, the force of tradition and the sense of reverence .”¹⁸

Fr. Chethimattam’s view expressed above seems to be guided by the principles of Vat. II concerning liturgical adaptation, because the document says “ ...Liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time...” (SC21). ‘Elements subject to change’ are what our writer calls ‘the human side of the ritual’. These will have to be changed, adapted to suit the particular cultural variables of the people so that the liturgy become relevant and meaningful. ‘The unchangeable elements in the liturgy’ are of divine origin and so they cannot be replaced. About these JBC would say, ‘they have the stamp of God’s self-disclosure to man’, and so have to remain so unchanged for ever. In order to explain the writer’s point of view we may consider an example here : Jesus instituted the Eucharist in the form of a meal/food which involves both eating and drinking. This form is basic to the Eucharistic mystery and its celebration in signs and symbols, whereas the concrete elements of the meal/ food may have to be changed depending upon the socio-cultural context and life style of the people concerned. ¹⁹ Moreover, Chethimattam also makes clear that ‘worship should not be an escape from the duties of a secular world and of social justice; it should be rather the act whereby the reality of God is made present and the resonance of that reality is heard in our communities and in our personal lives, dominating the

18 Ibid.

19 Although Fr. Chethimattam has not explained the point giving the above example of the Eucharist as a meal etc., I think that his very progressive ideas about contextualization and indigenous theology etc., logically leads to such radical liturgical inculuration as well, of course with necessary approval of the required authority.

instability of the times.²⁰ To put it differently, and citing another quotation, "Though the liturgy is the worship of God, it is not to take man away from his world, to escape from the tensions of his life, but to make him sensitive to the community, one with his brother next to him".²¹

Another aspect of the cultural adaptation of liturgy he would want to impress on us may be noted: He reminds us that liturgy is a kind of play or drama. Any play has its time, dress-code and a form distinct from ordinary life. Similarly, liturgy is something special. It is not for the sake of something else, but for the sake of the unique experience it contains. It is purposeless, but meaningful; pointless but significant. Participating in the liturgy means foregoing maturity with all its purposefulness and confining oneself to play.²² What our writer wants to tell us is this: Any process of liturgical inculcation must not have goals outside of liturgy itself, namely to make it more modern, colourful, impressive etc., but only to facilitate the unique experience of the divine it can impart. Otherwise, any over-enthusiasm to make liturgy closer to the feeling and mood of the people of the day, may become self-defeating, losing the vertical dimension and ending up as mere socializing process. The human and sacral dimensions of the liturgical symbolism should be well integrated in order to safe guard the wholeness of man, says the author.

He goes on to say that in any effort of cultural adaptation of liturgy, one has to keep balance between spontaneity and regularity, particularity and universality. The Council's liturgical reform policy has taken note of this double aspect. It has allowed some spontaneity

20 "Symbolism and Cult in World Religions Today" in *Jeevadhara* vol. 5 (1975) pp.329-34 (337).quoted from Trotter F. Thomas," Reality and Rsonance:The Church Turns towards Worship", *Religion in Life* 43 (1974)478-481

21 See Rembert Weakland OSB " Music as Art in Liturgy", *Worship* 41(1967)5-15

22 Chethimattam, " Symbolism and Cult in World Religions Today", op. cit.p. 338, quoted from Romano Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic Spirit of the Liturgy*, Sheed & Ward, 1935,p.179 and 183

in the celebration, for example in the case of the 'Prayer of the Faithful', 'Exchange of Peace' etc., while it is decreed that the liturgical texts should be approved by the appropriate authority. Briefly, he says, in all religious traditions, cultic symbolism implies a holistic approach to man. It combines the divine self-disclosure and human thirst towards the Absolute; the actual concerns of the present moment in history and the deposit of the whole past; the action of the individual and the self-expression of the faith-community. In any liturgical renewal and adaptation these two aspects have to be constantly kept in mind.²³

Besides, quoting Louis Bouyer, he warns both traditionalists and progressives in liturgical matters: Liturgical traditionalists are like the Monophysites, he says, because they take all ecclesiastical institutions as equally sacred and immutable; they forget the fact that 'liturgy spontaneously arose in the Christian community as the product of many individual efforts, gradually elaborated and continually evolving within the community from which they came'²⁴ Similarly, 'those who fail to see the divine self-disclosure in the liturgy, he adds, and consider it rather as a syncretic product borrowed from different religious traditions are caught in a sort of Nestorian dualism, because they do not see the unique event of salvation that forms the original source of the cultic movement. And the same is the case with those who would reject all sacrality in worship and consider it a mere celebration of the secular world.'²⁵ Also those who try to find in the Incarnation a

23 Cfr. Ibid. pp.340-344

24 Cfr. Ibid.p.344 and Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man: Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy*, tran. M.Joseph Costelloe, SJ, Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1963,p.6

25 It may be noted that JBC here does not belittle the importance of social feasts and festivals like the Feast of Fools in medieval Europe, and Holi in India. (To these we may add also the Western Carnival, the controversial Valentine Day etc.). In his article on "Man and Feast", *Jeevadhara* vol.6 (1976) pp.405-417, he on the one hand examines the natural origins of seasonal festivals as rejuvenation of time and celebrations of life-situations, but on the other explains very well the meaning of such human and secular celebrations: He says, " In

wholly new sacredness that came down entirely from heaven will not escape a similar dualism.²⁶

Concluding Remarks

In the foregoing few pages we have examined Chethimattam's remarks and reflections on culture and inculturation in general and on liturgical inculturation that emerges from them. We have done this mainly based on about half a dozen articles written by him mainly in *Jeevadhara*, and chapters in books edited by others. His approaches to inculturation has touched theological disciplines like Christology, Missiology, Theology of Religions and the like although I have not elaborated on them for two reasons: first of all, these areas are supposed to be covered by other writers and secondly they do not directly concern my topic.

As I went through these writings of JBC, I understood better that he had a strong and consistent view about the question of inculturation in general in which personally I feel quite close to him: He has rightly observed that the power of religion is the power of symbols, the ability to convey something other than itself; that religious truths do not exist in the abstract but as realized in concrete in particular cultural context, and hence the need of culture for religion. But culture also may contain harmful elements that may distort religion and religious values, as he has rightly said and Christmas celebration to day in the West has been shown as a typical example. In that connection he has made a strong remark on the question of women ordination: That God became incarnate as a male cannot be entertained as a valid

celebrations man proclaims his transcendence over, and freedom from, all his worldly pursuits and asserts his right to be simply himself, his capacity to rise above time and perceive its eternal meaning". He further adds, " What makes man different from the animals is his capacity to celebrate, and this is rooted in his capacity to understand what he is what he is doing. Even when he celebrates the mysteries and events of gods and deities he knows fully well that God does not need the human celebration; it is for man...." (p.412-13)

26 See the author's article "Symbolism and Cult in World Religions Today" cited in no.22 above, and Louis Louis Bouyer, Op.Cit.pp.7-11

reason to deny ordination to women from a cultural point of view, because sex just as race, religion, time, economic situation are also cultural factors, and these are not taken as restrictive of the priesthood in the Church.

He has further shown that only faith can be inculcated, not religion, because the latter is already a cultural factor. So he says that Christianity or Catholicism, as a particular embodiment of the gospel of Jesus, is a religious culture with its proper ethics of governance. The missionaries from the West made the mistake of transporting this religious culture to all the colonies instead of bringing the faith and inculcuate it.^{26a} Here the primary purpose of inculturation, he says, is to make religions relevant to the actual life of people, bringing about the reign of God in a particular time and place. This is the work of a prophet, he says, because in such ‘inculturation process’ there is a “dialectical encounter between an existing way of doing things and the new insights brought in by the prophet by his living faith”.²⁷

26a During the heated liturgical controversy in the Syro-Malabar Church in the 1980s and early 90s, Dr. Chethimattam seems to have written some articles in Malayalam criticizing those bent on a blind Chaldeanizing process. One such article has to my notice under the title “ Tradition is not Fetters” (*PARAMBARYAM KOOCHUVILANGALLA* - see *Carmela Kusumam*, August 1986 , quoted in Pushpa Rani, vol.VII, no.8 August 1986,p.13). In this article, he directly supports liturgical renewal and says “ Tradition is not fetters. Faith is handed down to us through historical tradition. However, it is only a general modal. Only such a Church can survive in to day’s world which, without prejudice to the gospel message, tradition and thought pattern, would proclaim the gospel and celebrate the liturgy, making necessary adaptations to the needs and requirements of persons, institutions and cultural contexts.....The printed prayers of the liturgy do not make liturgy; liturgy has to be a combined celebration of the priest and people....It has to be different according to the nature and stature of the participants. Only then it will be lively and active celebration.... Similarly, only when it is celebrated in tune with the needs of the people, time and place the sacred rite will be liturgy. Church proclamation and liturgical celebration are not exhibition of archeological findings; rather it is the self-manifestation of the people of God who are called by Word and Spirit of God.”(my translation from Malayalam)

27 “Religion the Cutting Edge of Culture” Op.cit.p.363

As we can see, his reflections on liturgical renewal is a natural sequel to his thoughts on culture and inculturation. He seems to add that it has to be the work of a prophet, not of a priest as a ritualist (temple pujari). Only a prophet will be ready to die for the cause he espouses, as was the case with Socrates who for having accused the corrupt Athenian society for its unjust actions had to pay for it by his life.²⁸ His reflections on the 'human aspect of the religious symbol,' that 'in the liturgy a language of gesture is used', that 'dance is the most original and most universal form of worship', – these and other similar ideas of JBC definitely show that he was very much for making liturgy a genuine place of experiential encounter of humans with God by making use of culturally relevant signs and symbols in it. We also notice that for him 'liturgy is not only worship of God, but also fellowship of the people' or to put it differently as he does, 'liturgy is worship centred in God in order to bring men together in fellowship as His children.' Similarly he holds that 'inculturation is oriented to a better treatment of humans rather than a better understanding of God' or again 'inculturation must lead to the removal of the oppressive nature of religious practices.'

Briefly, as I pointed out in my Introduction, Chethimattam has left for us some very important and valuable insights through his writings on the questions of inculturation of faith and doctrine on the one hand, and on liturgical inculturation as a natural sequel to them on the other. Finally I have a feeling that a more comprehensive collection of his writings, especially in Malayalam, may give us a better understanding of his stand on liturgy and liturgical inculturation.

Carmel Niketan,
Jabalpur

28 Ibid. This reminds me of my personal experience of having to face severe opposition and negative criticism from some Bishops in my sincere efforts for the cause of liturgical inculturation as envisaged by the Church soon after the Council. Ironically, Fr. JBC himself unwittingly and perhaps because he did not want to displease some of the Syro-Malabar Bishops, though he did not share their idea or agenda of chaldeanizing our liturgy, has been sometimes instrumental in giving me such experiences.

Chethimattam on the Theology of Religions, Dialogue and Mission

Paulachan Kochappilly

John Britto Chethimattam's publications on Theology of Religions, Dialogue and Evangelization are voluminous. Paulachan Kochappilly, a student of JBC and at present the Dean of the Faculty of Theology of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, makes an attempt here to summarize the main ideas of JBC on these themes. He quotes extensively from JBC's works and tries to interpret him. JBC writes mainly from the Indian context of religious pluralism and the socio-economic context of the people who aspire for integral liberation. In this context, dialogue of religions and liberative movements of the people should be the focus of the mission. It is nothing but to follow the mission and ministry of Jesus who proclaimed the Good News of the Coming of the Reign of God and demanded from people a radical conversion of heart.

Prof. John Britto Chethimattam CMI was a religious missionary endowed with a genuine Christian vision of global horizon. Whatever JBC said and did had a missionary touch. Evangelisation, to my mind, is the key to understand J. B. Chethimattam's contribution in the fields of theology of religion, dialogue and mission. According to me evangelisation is urgent and relevant. I am convinced of and committed to the world and work of evangelisation. I too unreservedly join Saint Paul in saying, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel."¹

1 J. B. Chethimattam, "Towards a World Theology: An Interreligious Approach to Theological Issues," in *Religion in Dialogue: East and West Meet*, eds. Zacharias P. Thundy, Kuncheria Pathil and Frank Podgorski (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America Inc., 1985), 314

Beyond any doubt, the work of evangelisation should be carried on and nobody should be deprived of the person and revelation in Jesus Christ, for He is not the monopoly of Christians. In this process of evangelisation one encounters the reality of the plurality of religions. In order to carry out the programme of evangelisation, dialogue with religions is suggested. And, fundamentally and finally, evangelisation is the mission of the Church. So all the three areas outlined in the topic are interrelated and move in the same direction of evangelisation.

In what follows is a study on the contribution of J. B. Chethimattam to the furthering of the reflection on i) the theology of religions, ii) the theology of dialogue and iii) the theology of mission.

1. The Theology of Religions

“All men form but one community. . . . all share in a common destiny, namely God” (NA 1). This is the core of the theology of religions according to Vatican II. The Council recognizes and respects the fact that “Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unresolved riddles of human existence” (NA 1). It reiterates that the Catholic Church “rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions” (NA 2). In addition, the Catholic Church exhorts the faithful “to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions” (NA 2). While the Church is convinced of and committed to the proclamation of Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life (NA 2), she invites and instructs the Christians to “acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture” (NA 2).

J. B. Chethimattam, a faithful son of the Church, shapes his theological investigations on religions in tune with the teaching of Vatican II. In the light of the common origin and destiny of creation, the professor reflects on the commonality and connectivity of all religions, “Salvation is the return of creation as a whole back to God from whom it proceeded as an epiphany of His reality. The world is His *lila*, sport. Hence religions are not mere conceptual systems, standing by themselves, but different perspectives of the same fact

that everything proceeds from God and returns to Him.”² God is the source and summit of creation. Everything is from God and moves towards God. The focus of our reflection is God. In God, we have our unity and the answer to the question of religious plurality. There is only one God and it is God who saves humanity. Hence there is only one history of the divine economy. Since “all religions are integral parts of that economy”³ the question J. B. Chethimattam takes up is that “how the Church can continue her mission to announce the Good News to all creation without the artificial help once received from the false sense of cultural superiority of the West and its political interest to conquer the world.”⁴ It is abundantly clear from this statement of the author that he is a theologian who is committed to the mission of the Church in preaching the Good News and one who discovers the place and significance of the people of other faiths within the economy of salvation. J. B. Chethimattam does not make any compromise with the truth of Christ and the Church, nor does he underestimate the faith and life of other religious traditions.

1.1. “All religions are integral parts of that economy”

In the first place, J. B. Chethimattam recognises, respects and responds to the plurality of religions in the world. He discovers the importance of each religion in the religious history of humanity. Every religion has a role to play in the overall programme of divine experience and economy, though they might be addressing religious experience from different aspects of life. The professor observes, “It is acknowledged that the religious history of the human race is one and that each of the world religions has made its own unique contribution to the solution of the basic existential questions faced by

2 J. B. Chethimattam, “Problems of an Indian Christian Theology: A Critique of Indian Theologizing,” in *Theologising in India*, ed. M. Amaladoss (Bangalore: TPI, 1981), 199.

3 J. B. Chethimattam, “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism: The Future of the Christian Mission,” in *A Missiology for Third Millennium: A Contextualised Mission Theology*, ed. Thomas Aykara (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997), 84.

4 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 84.

all.”⁵ This is the central insight on which our theologian discusses the theology of religions. In order to demonstrate the interlinking of the different religions, the author criticizes the reductionist tendencies in theologisation, “To reduce the religious history of mankind to disparate workings of the Logos in disconnected cultures and traditions is the denial of theology itself.”⁶ In this connection, J. B. Chethimattam finds fault with “Hindu-Christian theology” and “Unknown Christ theology,” which are “guilty of reductionism toward both Christianity and other religions.”⁷ According to the author, “Practically,” what could be traced in such attempt, “is a search for the common denominator between religions, discounting the particularities as mere socio-cultural expressions conditioned by history.”⁸

Another key concept connected with the central idea of the theology of religions is his emphasis on the phenomenology of religions. J. B. Chethimattam underlines the fact that “all have come to recognize that, though religion deals with the divine reality, it is very much a human phenomenon: the way human beings understand God and express that understanding in words, gestures, rituals, and traditions.”⁹ The aspirations and theological assertions of different religions are human attempts to experience God and to explore the ways to be in union and communion with God.

J. B. Chethimattam, a seasoned and solid theologian, observes that theology is “not comparative religion.”¹⁰ He adds, “Nor is it to create a Hindu-Christian theology stressing the common denominator of Hinduism and Christianity.”¹¹ The scholar is of the opinion that, “Christianity has no place or role in India unless it has a unique message to communicate.”¹² In the contemporary world of religious pluralism,

5 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 92.

6 “Problems of an Indian Christian Theology,” 199.

7 “Problems of an Indian Christian Theology,” 201.

8 *Ibid*

9 “Towards a World Theology,” 295.

10 “Problems of an Indian Christian Theology,” 204.

11 *Ibid*

12 *Ibid*

the author draws our attention to “the call to holiness” which “should be the main point of credibility of any religion, particularly in our land of intense religiosity.”¹³

1.2. “All religions as parallel systems... does injustice to all religions”

There is a greater progress in the area of research and inquiry into the different religious traditions and their contributions. What do they generally offer to humanity? This is a question that occupies the theologian. The bedrock of the theology of religions, for our author, is the unity of the religious history. All contribute to the religious experience of human history. They are not isolated realities. The religions are parts of one human history. There are common grounds on which they meet and inspire each other. They are not discreet entities having nothing to offer to the common destiny of humanity. “In the spirit of modernity and scientism and death,” J. B. Chethimattam points to oft arrived at conclusion, “all religions as parallel systems of wisdom, ideologies concerning the ultimate meaning and end of man,”¹⁴ and which is criticized by our author, “Such an approach, however, does injustice to all religions.”¹⁵

J. B. Chethimattam rightly observes that “Today no religious tradition can formulate its faith and scheme of practice in isolation from other systems and traditions.”¹⁶ This reveals the basic openness and the interrelatedness of every religious tradition. Religions influence humanity depending on “the effective spiritual leadership they provide to their followers in the name of God and in the name of universal humanity, though in their concrete socio-historical context.”¹⁷

J. B. Chethimattam points out the “strange phenomenon” of the anti-missionary attitude and approach along the line of the emergence of a “theology of religions.” According to this school of thinking the

13 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 101.

14 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 95.

15 Ibid

16 – “Towards a World Theology,” 297.

17 “Problems of an Indian Christian Theology,” 199-200.

praxis and relevance of evangelisation is challenged. It bluntly puts forward, “So why not leave them alone, learn as much as possible from them, and restrict mission to doing social work for them and fighting all forms of injustice?”¹⁸ The author delineates some of the arguments of anti-missionary theology:¹⁹ i) each religion contains divine revelation and can save its followers; ii) religion as a communal conversation intelligible only to the initiates; iii) religion can only divide people; iv) religion as a tool for superiority or domination; v) Jesus of Nazareth was only one manifestation of the divine Logos; vi) all religions are the effort blind men to define the elephant; and vii) put God the common factor of all religions in the centre instead of Christ. These are some of the leading trends of thoughts that tear down the very fabric of theology of religions.

At the onslaught of missionary enterprises of the Church, J. B. Chethimattam thinks consistently and argues convincingly the right and duty of Christianity to preach the Good News. “It does not seek to prove other religions wrong, but only announce the “Good News” that with the definitive entry of the Son of God into human history in Jesus of Nazareth, there is a new order of salvation in which all are enabled to become sons and daughters of God in the Only Begotten. The Christian message stands or falls with the history of the event of the mission, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God.”²⁰ As far as our theologian is concerned, there is no compromise whatsoever on this count.

1.3. “An effective divinisation of the recipient”

An insightful and creative theologian like J. B. Chethimattam points out the guiding feature of theology of religions should be nothing short of theosis. This is to rediscover and radiate the image of God in us. In his opinion “All divine revelation implies an effective divinisation of the recipient.”²¹ It is to this end that the theology of religions should strive. In this manner, J. B. Chethimattam gives an orientation

18 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 92.

19 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 92-94.

20 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 95.

21 “Towards a World Theology,” 299.

and direction to the development of the theology of religions. The council of Vatican II concludes its declaration on other religions with a similar note, “to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:45)”(NA 5). The primary objective of an Indian Christian theology, according to our author, “is not merely to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of academics nor to continue endlessly the tiring comparison between Western and Eastern religious traditions.”²² J. B. Chethimattam suggests the following objectives²³ of an Indian Christian theologizing:

- i. Supernatural Destiny: to evaluate the historical situation and reflectively express God’s eschatological salvific plan and the meaning of Christ in the context of religious pluralism. Christianity should act as the catalyst, the leaven in the mass, to make all aware of their supernatural destiny.
- ii. Moral and Religious Values: to emphasise the values traditionally provided by religions, but lost in the present turmoil of industrialization and urbanization, values emphasized by the life and preaching of Jesus Christ.
- iii. Build Up Human Community: Since religion and theology are interpretations of symbols, emphasis must be placed on those symbols that liberate the human mind and direct the attention to the unity of human history, the equality of all men as children of God, their unity in one authentic human family, and their responsibility to give their best for the good of all. To achieve this, Christian theologians have to become aware of and fight against the deep individualism and rationalism of the Western theology in which they were trained in the seminary.
- iv. Self-Criticism to be Fully Incarnate: make their theological insights reincarnate in the life and concerns of the people. Theologians have to hold in view the basic concerns of the people in a developing country like India: a) Theology that should interest man today must have relevance for his economic condition and social situation; b) Man in India has the capacity to discover the

22 “Problems of an Indian Christian Theology,” 204.

23 “Problems of an Indian Christian Theology,” 204-206.

harmony of factors in a situation of conflict, and to see the world itself as an epiphany of the spirit; c) must recognise the need for a theological pluralism in the approach to faith and provide for it.

J. B. Chethimattam directs our attention to the method of theologisation as well. To his mind “Theology cannot be imported. It has to grow out of the life and reflection of the people.”²⁴ Theological investigations should take place in the ethos of the people. The ethos of the people is a complex reality. Along with the socio-cultural settings, there is the need to address the religious fabric of our people. According to the author, “Indian tradition is rooted in a concept of history that looks at time as an epiphany of the eternal, happenings in the world a manifestation of the sport of the Lord who is present in the midst of his people.”²⁵ In the theological method of J. B. Chethimattam, there is a beautiful and sublime blend of earth and heaven. This touch of the reality makes him a theologian of his time and beyond. The theologisation should address the reality of God and the necessities of human beings. “The scope of divine revelation is not merely to provide us with some information on the divinity, to construct an ontology of God, but rather to reveal man to man himself with God as the horizon of the full meaning of his life.”²⁶ In this connection, J. B. Chethimattam underscores, “In the Christ the human race met with the Godhead in bodily form.”²⁷

The theology of religions prepares the ground for the development of the theology of dialogue. In the thinking of J. B. Chethimattam, “All believers need constant self-criticism regarding their grasp of faith, and they have to extend this service of criticism also to their partners in interreligious dialogue.”²⁸ And this insight into the inherent interconnection between the theology of religions and theology of dialogue instills an interest to discuss his theology of dialogue.

24 “Problems of an Indian Christian Theology,” 204.

25 Ibid

26 “Towards a World Theology,” 299.

27 “Towards a World Theology,” 300.

28 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 100.

2. The Theology of Dialogue

Dialogue is the mode of existence and excellence. It is the way to peace, progress and prosperity. It is the divine design for wholeness, fullness and holiness. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council is challenging, “We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God’s image” (NA 5). The theology of dialogue is not a luxury for Christians, but mandatory on account of the human solidarity and common destiny. In this regard, the teaching of the Church obliges the Catholics to follow the mind of Christ. “Therefore, the Church reprobates, as foreign to the mind of Christ any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, colour, condition in life or religion” (NA 5). Making the mind of the Church precise and practical, J. B. Chethimattam observes, “Remaining faithful to our tradition and stating it without ambiguity, we have to show respect to other people’s convictions and show also a willingness to work with them for the good of all people.”²⁹ This is what the Council explicitly exhorts. “Through loyalty to conscience Christians are joined to other men in the search of truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships” (GS 16).

2.1. *“Even the most perfect religion is not absolute truth”*

The fundamental reason for religious dialogue is to be traced in the various limitations attached to religion. J. B. Chethimattam speaks emphatically, “Even the most perfect religion is not absolute truth, but is characterized by various limitations, social, cultural, political and the like.”³⁰ According to our author, to overcome these limitations is important and he, therefore, suggests religion, “needs liberation in interaction with other truth systems. Interreligious dialogue, therefore, even for the most perfect of religions is not a luxury, but a need lest it should remain a prisoner to its own limitations.”³¹

29 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 105.

30 “Towards a World Theology,” 296.

31 Ibid

J. B. Chethimattam goes a step further and suggests yet another reason to engage in religious dialogue on the basis of global concerns. The theologian with a sense of the times writes, “But the most important reason for interreligious cooperation is the universality of religious problems and of religious truths.”³² He elucidates some of the religious truths, “If there is a God, there is a God also for atheist; and, if that God is really triune, the divine reality is a Trinity also for the Unitarians. One’s particular preferences and prejudices and immediate concerns cannot affect the objective state of affairs.”³³ According to him, the claims of superiority by religions should be traced elsewhere. “All claims of superiority and position of privilege made by one religion over the other often stem from national pride and attempts at economic, political, and cultural domination of one group over others.”³⁴ In order to substantiate this view, the teacher argues in the following manner. “One of the first discoveries Christianity had to make before it could launch its mission to evangelize the world is expressed in the words of St. Peter at Caesarea addressing the Gentile Cornelius and his companions: “I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality. Rather, the man of any nation who fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to him” (Acts 10: 34-35).”³⁵

2.2. *“A message of salvation for all humanity”*

J. B. Chethimattam held the view that “Each of the world religions claims to be a message of salvation for all humanity.”³⁶ And every religion has something to offer to humanity, especially on the question of religious experience. It is the unity of the human family and oneness of its religious history, which makes religious dialogue vital and necessary. “If the unity of the human family and oneness of its religious history are denied there is no reason even for interreligious

32 Ibid

33 Ibid

34 Ibid

35 Ibid

36 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 95.

dialogue.”³⁷ In addition, the author observes, “Dialogue presupposes that there is a ‘logos’ a common understanding uniting the partners.”³⁸ On account of the uniting logos, “All human insight is not for selfish hoarding but a trust for creative communication. Communicative action is germane to human self-knowledge.”³⁹ And this becomes all the more important to note that “in history no religion started with an abstract idea of God, but from a concrete experience of the meaning of God in human life.”⁴⁰ Therefore, each religious experience can throw light on different aspects of human life in its pilgrimage towards God, the ultimate goal.

While J. B. Chethimattam admits that the religions are relative regarding their ultimate goal, he addresses some of the accusations squarely. To his mind, religions “are not relative to each other like the efforts of blind men to draw the composite picture of the elephant. Even to know that they are dealing with the same animal someone with eyes has to guide them.”⁴¹ At this juncture, our theologian emphatically subscribes to the uniqueness of Christianity, “The Son who came from the Father alone can be such a guide.”⁴²

2.3. “Dialogue is the means towards such radical conversion”

J. B. Chethimattam rightly points out the end of dialogue as conversion. In his opinion, “Dialogue is the means towards such radical conversion.”⁴³ According to him, “The Spirit of God is already at work in all hearts and one who communicates the Gospel has first to listen to the Spirit speaking through the seekers of grace and salvation.”⁴⁴ The author presents two types of conversion, namely,

37 Ibid

38 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 96.

39 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 98.

40 Ibid

41 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 97.

42 Ibid

43 J. B. Chethimattam, “CMI Religious Life for the Cause of the Church,” *Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 17 (April-June 2006), 34.

44 “CMI Religious Life for the Cause of the Church,” 34.

conversion as “individual and personal” and “social, communitarian, cultural, economic and family” centred.⁴⁵ Whatever be the mode of conversion, it is directed ultimately to God, the source, support and summit of human search. In order to promote conversion of hearts, JBC insists on the communication of one’s faith experience, since it is part of the same religious history rooted in God. “In the context of this one, shared religious history, Christianity is an event, the “news” of which must be “communicated” to all the human community.”⁴⁶ Without any hesitation, J. B. Chethimattam consistently concludes, “Everyone has the right to know what God did in Jesus, his Son for the sake of the whole human race.”⁴⁷ This is to underline the fundamental aspects of dialogue as identity and humility with regard to one’s faith experience.

It is important to take notice of the observation of J. B. Chethimattam concerning the trend of the overemphasis on dialogue. Along the line of single religious history, one the one hand, he outlines the importance of dialogue and on the other, repudiates the overemphasis:

But overemphasis on dialogue seems to imply that the other’s faith is his tradition, his history, and it has no relevance for me except to look at from the outside and pick and choose what suits my taste. On the other hand, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and all their teachings belong equally to all. Human family is one, and only it happened by historical accident that some of us are Hindus, others Muslims and some others Christians. True evangelism considers a Hindu’s faith one’s own faith and seeks to find out how Jesus belongs to the history of the Hindus as well. A Muslim’s faith is my own faith and I seek only to present Jesus as belonging to the prophetic tradition a Muslim upholds, and a Buddhist can discover in Jesus the same spiritual illumination Buddha announced.⁴⁸

45 Ibid

46 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 96.

47 Ibid

48 Ibid

In his approach to religious dialogue, J. B. Chethimattam is a committed Christian, who considers the uniqueness of Christian faith while he is ready to make the joint pilgrimage of faith with people of other faiths. Unambiguously, the author observes, “In the perspective of Christianity only through the one Son of God can human beings become sons and daughters of God, and Christ is the centre of religion precisely on account of his divinity.”⁴⁹ At the same time, recognising the importance of other faiths he writes that the Christian mission is to be understood as a “joint pilgrimage with the people of other faith. Its primary task is building with all people of good will the Kingdom of God in this world, making it hospitable to all God’s children.”⁵⁰ He has a solid reason to propose the joint pilgrimage while committed to one’s own faith experience. For him, “The starting point for all believers is the divine gift of faith, which cannot be merited by human efforts. Hence all religions are trying to express and explain that basic gift of faith according to one or other coordinate of human existence.”⁵¹

The maturity and beauty of J. B. Chethimattam on religious dialogue comes to the fore as he elaborates his thought on and experience of God, the end of conversion. He argues, “There is not one God for the Hindus and another for the Muslims. We are all one people; only some of us happened to be Hindus, some Muslims and some Christians, and a sizeable section without any God or faith, often owing to no fault of their own.”⁵² On reasonable and equal ground, J. B. Chethimattam criticizes and dismisses “the old style of bringing truth to the ignorant, faith to the faithless and salvation to the condemned.”⁵³ Nevertheless, he finds the importance of Jesus Christ in the theology of dialogue. In his opinion “The only question is what Jesus, who is equally the historical heritage of all human beings has

49 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 98-99.

50 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 92.

51 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 99.

52 Ibid

53 Ibid

specially to contribute to the messages of other religious leaders.”⁵⁴ In addition, admitting “general rules governing all games as expression of play and distinctive rules for each game,” he draws the attention, “No religion says that its insights and the divine revelation claimed by it are exclusively for its members.”⁵⁵ Admitting the contributions of different religions in enriching the faith experience, our author seeks the significance of different religions, “The different religions mark different orientations of the same basic faith experience”⁵⁶ In this sense, J. B. Chethimattam shows the way to God as the path of the theology of dialogue.

The train of thought in the theology of religion and dialogue focuses on the Logos, the Word, the Son of God. This is the serene current that runs through and through the mind of J. B. Chethimattam and makes him a theologian of all and for every season. It is the nectar that is churned out from the ocean of religious pluralism and the eternal yet contextual religious dialogue. Uncompromisingly, as a result of deep contemplation our theologian makes his point from his faith experience. “It was to find one’s identity in the Word, the one Son of God who became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth in the fullness of time.”⁵⁷ In view of the divinisation through constant conversion, the author presents the Word as the unique and only model and ideal. This is the launching pad for his theology of mission, which is the subject matter of the following section.

3. The Theology of Mission

The theology of mission emerges from the sense of being sent to spread the joy of the Lord in the world. Jesus shared his heart with his disciples for the cause of joy, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15: 11). So also the apostles preached the Good News with the same conviction, “We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1: 4). The Church is sent to the nations by the

54 Ibid

55 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 98.

56 Ibid

57 “CMI Religious Life for the Cause of the Church,” 33.

command of her founder to be “the universal sacrament of salvation” (AG 1). She “is even more urgently called upon to save and renew every creature, so that all things might be restored in Christ, and so that in him men might form one family and one people of God” (AG 1). The Church understands her missionary activity as intimately bound up with human nature and its aspirations. According to the teachings of the Church, both Christ and the Church “transcend the distinctions of race and nationality, and so cannot be considered as strangers to anyone or in any place” (AG 8). The mission of the Church is “to reveal and communicate the love of God to all men and to all peoples” (AG 10). And the Church on earth is “by its very nature missionary, since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (AG 2). The task of missionary activity is to “reveal Christ to the world, helping each person to find himself in Christ, . . . helping everyone to get to know “the unreachable riches of Christ”, since these riches are for every individual and are everybody’s property” (RH 11). This is the key thought of J. B. Chethimattam in his theology of mission.

Citing the inaugural address of Jesus, “The time is fulfilled. Repent and believe the Good News!” (Mk 1: 15), J. B. Chethimattam reflects upon it as a call “for conversion, a radical turn in direction, a change of mind. This was a call for directing attention to God, one’s own origin.”⁵⁸ According to our author, “What was utterly new was the coming of the Kingdom.”⁵⁹ The reflection on the imagery of the kingdom of God as presented by the different evangelists is insightful and meaningful throwing light on various aspects of our missionary endeavour. “This unique intervention of God in human history was presented by Mark’s gospel as the triumph of the suffering Messiah, by Mathew as radicalization of the Old Law in the new Law of love, by Luke as the reversal of unjust oppression, and by John as a new filial relationship to God.”⁶⁰ In the teaching of J. B. Chethimattam, “Evangelization is not, however, primarily an effort to snatch people out of hell. It is an invitation to all believers to recognize the new

58 Ibid

59 Ibid

60 “CMI Religious Life for the Cause of the Church,” 33-34.

spiritual reality made available to them in Jesus Christ.”⁶¹ Furthermore, he attaches great importance to holiness, which according to our theologian is pivotal in the missionary enterprise. The mission is “a call to sanctity and extraordinary friendship with the personal Triune God and to an apostleship to communicate this new order of salvation to all fellow human beings.”⁶²

3.1. “It proclaims what is implicitly sought in every religion”

The genesis of the theology of mission is in the person and mission of Christ. J. B. Chethimattam holds fast the genuine faith of Christianity. He teaches, “Christianity is unique because it proclaims what is implicitly sought in every religion, that the human race which is one with a single history has effectively encountered God in Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶³ He places Christ at the centre of the Church’s mission. In him, we encounter a true Christian theologian, who gives great importance to Christ-event. “What happened in Jesus Christ, namely his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, has effectively transformed human history for all men.”⁶⁴ For him, Christ is the unique and universal Saviour. Upholding the Christian belief and tradition, he makes the point that in Jesus Christ “the human race has a new and divine head in whom divine life and salvation is made available to all.”⁶⁵

J. B. Chethimattam does not underestimate the truth and value of the Church to gain cheap popularity or build up a new theology without taking into consideration the faith community. He upholds the biblical revelation, “The movement he started was not to end with him. He gathered twelve disciples symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, trained them and sent them out on missions. They were chosen as a group to share his mission from the Father.”⁶⁶ Accordingly, after the

61 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 100.

62 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 100-101.

63 “Towards a World Theology,” 314.

64 Ibid

65 Ibid

66 “CMI Religious Life for the Cause of the Church,” 34.

departure of Jesus, “the movement he started took shape in the given socio-political circumstances as the church, “to teach all nations what he taught and to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁷ J. B. Chethimattam was never ashamed to be known as a disciple of Jesus, but he considered it to be a great gift to carry on the mission of Jesus Christ entrusted to the apostles.

The author is particular that in the missionary undertakings of the Church, she has to follow the path of the cross, the mystery of salvation and of human life. “The point of departure for this new evangelisation for Christianity is the call of the crucified Christ present in the depth of suffering of his present-day members, the exploited workers, the marginalized, the godless and the big mass of people in every religion who have lost faith in organized [religions].”⁶⁸ In directing the attention of the readers to the least, the last and the lost, J. B. Chethimattam emerges as a prominent theologian having the touch and taste of the down-to-earth realities of human life. It shows his greatness and his readiness to follow the path of Christ, who became a servant. He does not stop there, but goes a step further and acknowledges the merit of being a man of simple faith. “The quality and merit of one’s faith-response are not decided by one’s education, talents, position in life and such other factors but by how one’s naked self is related to God, with the help of, or even in spite of one’s endowments.”⁶⁹ It is a great gesture of acknowledging and appreciating the beauty of being a Christian theologian, who is primarily a simple believer in God and a follower of Christ.

3.2. “Christ and the Christian Gospel are not a monopoly”

In the universal plan of God in Christ through the Spirit for the salvation of all is the thesis of the theology of mission. J. B. Chethimattam thinks loudly and clearly on the mission of the Church. Consistently the author argues, “Christ and the Christian Gospel are not a monopoly or a special privilege of any particular group, but the

67 Ibid

68 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 101.

69 Ibid

common right of all human beings.”⁷⁰ A missionary is called for “a total surrender to God and his Kingdom in a radical discipleship to his Son, to be and to act as true child of God.”⁷¹ The task of Christians is to follow the footsteps of the Jesus, who “focused attention on the onward march and fulfillment of history, the integrity of human family and its common destiny and the interrelationship of humans as adults in a universal community.”⁷²

The Christian mission is to focus on the total and integral liberation of all. It should address the hunger, ailments, misery and poverty of the people. The kingdom of God must be presented to all in the light and spirit of the beatitudes declared by Jesus Christ. In the disclosure of the kingdom of God, “Jesus meant that the reign of God does not depend on wealth or other factors which are generally regarded as necessary for the good life, and the good life is possible even for the deprived and the powerless.”⁷³ In other words, the mission of the Church should be in fidelity and continuity to the mission of Jesus, who understood himself as anointed to preach the Good News to the poor.

Keeping in mind the need for re-evangelisation, new evangelisation is the need of the hour. The new evangelisation emphasizes that “it is a new order of the world established in the person of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁴ One basic dimension of this new evangelisation is that “it is an optimistic look on our world.”⁷⁵ Another important aspect of the evangelisation is the sense and practice of “the equality of all peoples.”⁷⁶

3.3. “To bring everyone to this threefold encounter with God”

J. B. Chethimattam advocates the scope of mission work as “to bring everyone to this threefold encounter with God.”⁷⁷ In the back

70 “Towards a World Theology,” 314.

71 “CMI Religious Life for the Cause of the Church,” 34.

72 “Post-Modern, Post-Scientific Evangelism,” 89.

73 Ibid 89-90. 74 Ibid 103.

75 Ibid 102. 76 Ibid 90.

77 Ibid 104.

of his mind, the author has the Eastern conception of the Trinity, which according to him “places the emphasis on persons, each of whom has the whole divinity and each of whom is a point of personal encounter.”⁷⁸ The threefold encounter has a distinctive yet unitive way. He expresses the encounter of “the Spirit as dwelling in the heart of everyone as inner controller, and meets with the Son as one in whom all human beings are enabled to cry ‘Abba’, Father.”⁷⁹ All things are directed to the interior experience of God and exterior expression of the divine-human encounter. These are two poles of the religious experience. The mission of the Church should take these two poles into consideration simultaneously.⁸⁰

In this respect of religious experience, J. B. Chethimattam concludes saying, “how religion responds to the human situation is the test of its credibility.”⁸¹ He is highly eloquent in emphasizing the socio-cultural dimensions of the mission. “The bedrock of evangelization,” according to J. B. Chethimattam, “should be the authentic experience of the people, their needs and concerns. It is where the Spirit of God is actually present and fashioning the body of the Risen Lord.”⁸² In the elucidation of the point, he teaches that “the role of the Church is specifically to provide flesh, shape and a human face, or in Hindu philosophical terminology name and form, to the divine persons speaking within the heart of the human being searching for God.”⁸³ At this point of evangelization, there is the totality and integrity of the encounter with God.

Following the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the missionary Church is duty bound to preach the Good News of the kingdom of God and invite people to conversion. The author is aware of the crisis involved in conversion. Nevertheless, he presupposes conversion as the essential result of the personal encounter with God. He enumerates

78 Ibid

79 Ibid

80 Ibid

81 Ibid

82 Ibid 105.

83 Ibid 104.

the dynamics of conversion, which “supposes a stage of crisis and a dissatisfaction with the life in the people concerned, calls for a search for new ways of thinking and acting, encounter with a person or group whose message responds to one’s needs, interaction with them, a commitment to break with the past and accept the new way, and to grow in the new life with the support of the community.”⁸⁴

One of the central thoughts of J. B. Chethimattam regarding evangelization is that it should be focusing on the last, the least, and the lost. In this connection, he makes a very practical point, “Anyone who devotes his life to the service of the least one’s brethren, whether one realizes it or not, is on the way to encounter Jesus.”⁸⁵ The encounter of Jesus Christ is the touchstone of a person being evangelized. In his estimation, there are two types of missionaries: those who proclaim the Gospel in a detached manner and those who are engaged in establishing the values of the kingdom of God. Highlighting the importance of the latter, J. B. Chethimattam observes, “The other is engaged primarily in kingdom values like health, education, human rights, which are equally missionary as explicit proclamation of the Gospel.”⁸⁶ And according to our theologian, “This latter requires a total transformation of the missionary, a style of spirituality that calls for humble identification with the groping and searching community, reading the signs of the times and looking whither the Spirit is leading the Church.”⁸⁷

Conclusion

In the light of the brief survey of the theology of religions, dialogue and mission of J. B. Chethimattam, a rare composite picture of his rationality, religiosity and personality come to the broad daylight. He is a genuine theologian of India fitting to be named as a son of the soil, who is at home with the plurality of religions, the diversity of cultures and who is concerned about the misery and poverty of his people of the motherland in his theological investigations and missionary

84 “CMI Religious Life for the Cause of the Church,” 34.

85 “Towards a World Theology,” 313.

86 “CMI Religious Life for the Cause of the Church,” 34-35.

87 Ibid

orientations. He is a faithful catholic Christian theologian, for he is rooted in his faith in Christ, who is the unique and universal Lord and Saviour of the whole world and finds the significance for evangelisation and insists on the new evangelisation. He is a theologian of Oriental tempo, touch and taste, for his personal, relational and experiential thrusts found in the contextual theologizing.

As far as the subject matter of this paper is concerned, J. B. Chethimattam is conversant, competent and comfortable with the theology of religions, dialogue and mission. As a true theologian of the Church, primarily and fundamentally, J. B. Chethimattam explains and elaborates the teaching of the Church, taking the context into special consideration. To him, all these three areas are interrelated, and one mirrors the other. It seems that he does not suggest any strict order of the matter in the process or progress of theological reflection. Going through the trend of the treatise, one may be inclined to begin with the theology of religions and go over to the theology of mission through the theology of dialogue. If religions are seen as the experiential situation, dialogue could be understood as the intellectual and practical means for evangelization, which is total, integral and spiritual flowering of the person leading to theosis or divinisation. If the different religions are understood as the point of departure in the theological investigations, dialogue is the way taking us to the point of arrival, that is, the theology of mission. If religions are different musical instruments, dialogue is the masterly stroke of these instruments for the symphony of evangelization. In this sense, it is proper and fitting to state that evangelization is an encompassing act or event in the life of the Church with regard to her mission entrusted by Christ to preach the Good News of Salvation to all peoples of all ages and cultures. This orientation of J. B. Chethimattam is accessible in his own statement, "To make this Gospel known to all men, the Church has to enter into active dialogue not merely in words but in real deed with men of other faiths."⁸⁸

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